

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 29 : Number Three : Fall 2008

Prospects of Reconciliation

Understanding Psychic Default

Peace-makers in Northern Ireland

Forgiveness Helps Humanization

Communal Discernment

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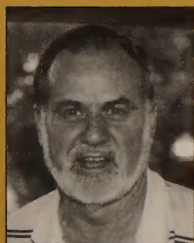
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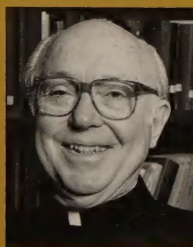
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## **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

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Manuscripts should be submitted to the Executive Editor, Linda Amadeo, either (1) as e-mail attachments in any Windows-based (not Macintosh) word-processing program from 2000 or earlier or (2) by mail (see addresses below). Unaccepted mailed manuscripts will not be returned unless submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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# Editor's Page

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

Five years ago Fr. Michael Sheeran, S.J., president of Regis University, called me at the request of Jim Gill, S.J., to ask me to take over as editor-in-chief of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. Jim was getting weaker and weaker from the cancer that would eventually take his life the following year and had asked Fr. Sheeran if Regis University would become the publisher of the magazine. Jim had had a long and happy involvement with the University as a member of the board of trustees and its president for a time. I agreed to try to fill his big shoes and have done my best for the past five years. However, last year I came to the conclusion that HUMAN DEVELOPMENT needed a younger person as editor, someone who was more in tune with modern publishing ways and the internet. This year I will be 78 years old; it seemed the time for a change. So I wrote to Fr. Sheeran to say that I would step down at the end of the 2008 volume year, and he agreed to search for a new editor. I am happy to let you devoted readers of the magazine know that Robert Hamma, presently editorial director of Ave Maria Press and a member of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT's advisory board, will become the editor-in-chief with the spring issue of 2009. I am delighted that Bob Hamma has agreed to take on this task. He brings to us a wealth of experience in publishing and will, I'm sure, move the magazine into its next phase of development with skill and foresight. I know that you will greet him with the same warmth and acceptance that you accorded me when I became the editor-in-chief.

This issue of the magazine continues the theme we began with the summer issue, namely forgiveness/reconciliation. In this issue, however, our focus will move to the even thornier issue of how to bring about reconciliation between conflicting groups. In so many parts of our world seemingly intractable and irresolvable conflicts cause untold suffering and threaten world stability. It is often painful to read the daily newspapers or

to listen to the news, so many are the stories of atrocity and retaliation. Some are tempted to avoid reading or listening to the news, but this ostrich approach does not change our reality. Moreover, we cannot retreat into some ivory tower or peaceful retreat any more, since what happens in one part of the globe affects us all. Turmoil in Kenya or Afghanistan or Lebanon affects not only the neighboring countries but the rest of the world because of the network of business, economic and social ties that bind the world together in an unprecedented way.

The words of the 17<sup>th</sup> century English poet and priest John Donne now have a much wider range than Europe:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, ...; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

Protracted conflicts toll the bell for all of us in our modern world.

Moreover, no matter where we are, we are probably involved in some social conflicts. Families are often divided by hurts that go back years, if not generations. Divisions have riven the church almost from its inception and still cause sometimes violent conflicts. Even within denominations seemingly irreconcilable disputes keep members apart. The Roman Catholic Church, for all its vaunted catholicity, sounds like a house divided more often than not. Non-Christians cannot now easily say what the early Christian apologist Tertullian maintained that pagans said of



Christians, "Look how they love one another and how they are ready to die for each other."

This issue of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT is presented to offer some hope and some practical advice for bringing about healing and reconciliation. Our authors offer no panaceas since there are no easy solutions. As Christians, however, we cannot despair of our world precisely because, in Jesus, God has become part and parcel of it. Moreover, we have the promise and the gift of the indwelling Spirit who continually moves human hearts toward forgiveness, compassion and reconciliation. We are, after all, made in the image and likeness of God who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Psalm 86:15), whom Jesus imaged as the prodigally loving and forgiving father of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). The Spirit of God is poured out into our hearts so that we might live as images of such a God. Forgiveness and reconciliation are possible because God is with us. For the sake of our world and God's dream we must urgently pray to believe in the possibility of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace even where it seems next to impossible. "I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24) must be our constant prayer. Our authors offer hope and encouragement in this spirit.

We begin the issue with an article on forgiveness as the pathway to becoming more human by Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S. As Jesus' ministry aimed to bring back into the community those who had been excluded, so too forgiveness, even of the seemingly unforgivable, no matter how difficult, is possible and the only way to rehumanize both those who suffer and those who perpetrate the suffering. I follow with a suggestion for a way through some of the conflicts that afflict many Roman Catholic parishes, dioceses and religious congregations. Relations between Anglo- and African-Americans in the United States have been problematic

from the beginning. With wisdom and personal investment Gregory Chisholm, S.J., sheds light on how U.S. citizens might move forward to achieve real community between the races. Raymond Helmick, S.J., in a return engagement, demonstrates how the "hard men" of Northern Ireland, those on both sides of the conflict who were in prison for very serious crimes against their "enemies," came to the conclusion that the only way to live in Northern Ireland was through reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants. Our poet and essayist James Torrens, S.J., invites us into a meditation on the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Matt Garr, S.J., an American Jesuit now a member of the province of Peru, writes about his difficult work for reconciliation in that country. He and Joseph Murhula, who writes movingly about the challenges of reconciliation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, indicate how perilously difficult it is to achieve reconciliation where severe and prolonged atrocities have been perpetrated. With her usual gentle and personal way of telling a story Margaret Cessna, H.M., reminds us that we in the First World need to welcome those who have escaped the horrors of genocidal hatred. We round off the issue with Susanne Mayer, I.H.M.'s wise meditation on the psychic defaults that keep us in situations of conflict. In reading this issue, I hope that you are moved to compassion and a willingness to work for reconciliation as much as I have been.

*Bill Barry S.J.*

William A. Barry, S.J.  
Editor-in-Chief



# FORGIVENESS

## as a pathway to humanization

Robert Schrieter, C.P.P.S.

In the past two decades, there has been an enormous growth of interest in healing and reconciliation. The need for these in our lives is of course not new; but the stresses and strains of postmodern life have seemed to stimulate an even greater interest in how to overcome division and painful memories in the past.

A key moment in the reconciliation process is that of forgiveness. Forgiveness usually represents an important turning point in the journey toward healing and reconciliation, as victims become able to consider a different relationship with those who have harmed them. In recent years psychologists, especially in the United States, have become specially interested in forgiveness as an exercise in mental health. To forgive, they tell us, improves the quality of one's life by reducing the harmful consequences of harboring anger and resentment, as well as by setting the scene for more lasting and satisfying relationships. Interest among psychologists has grown such that it has created a whole new field in the discipline known as "forgiveness studies."

Christianity, of course, has always taken a special interest in acts of forgiveness. The forgiveness of sins and the forgiveness extended between human beings feature prominently in the ministry of Jesus. Asking God to forgive us as we forgive others is set before Christians in the Lord's Prayer itself. And the forgiveness extended to Christians through the sacraments of baptism, reconciliation and Eucharist puts forgiveness at the center of Christian practice.





Forgiveness is giving up the right to  
resentment toward past grievances and  
taking steps to forge a different  
relationship with both those grievances and  
the person or persons who perpetrated them.

The psychological and theological features of forgiveness have been explored in detail in recent issues of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. In this article, I want to look especially at one part of forgiveness, namely, the dehumanizing and rehumanizing features of forgiving. We all know that forgiving someone who has harmed us is often very difficult. When the necessity of forgiveness is pressed upon victims prematurely, it can be harmful in several different ways—re-victimizing the victim or dehumanizing the victim by trivializing the harm that has been done. But we also know that harboring a grudge over a long period of time can dehumanize a victim as well. Just what are the features of the process of forgiveness that can diminish or, conversely, empower a victim? It is this particular dimension of forgiveness that I wish to explore here. In order to do so, I begin here with a working definition of forgiveness, and then sketch out two particular situations in which forgiveness is not only difficult, but threatening to our very sense of humanity: when forgiveness is seen as betrayal of others, and when the immensity of the wrongdoing seems unforgivable. These two forms of forgiveness figure largely in situations of social forgiveness. I then conclude with a reflection on what might be called a “culture of forgiveness,” paralleling in some way what the late Pope John Paul II called a “culture of life” in *Evangelium Vitae*.

#### WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

Forgiveness has, of course, been defined in many different ways. Perhaps the most widely held definition among psychologists goes something like this: forgiveness is giving up the right to resentment toward past grievances and taking steps to forge a different rela-

tionship with both those grievances and the person or persons who perpetrated them. Each of the elements in this definition is important. When one has been harmed or aggrieved, there is a sense of offense, an offense that should not have occurred. What results is an attitude of resentment—a feeling that the treatment we have received makes us less than who we are. Our humanity is diminished in some measure. The perpetrator’s action against us says, in effect, that we are not of equal dignity with the wrongdoer. Hence, one can speak of a “right” to resentment because part of the honor and esteem that should be accorded to us by simply being a human being (and for Christians, made in the image and likeness of God) has not been recognized.

To forego the right to resentment means that we choose not to accept the act of diminishment that has been perpetrated upon us as defining who we really are. Actions taken to create a different relationship with the perpetrator signify that we are acting out of a different framework than that of the perpetrator. That is especially the case as we try to forge a more positive relationship which says, in a simple way, that we honor the dignity of the wrongdoer and that our sense of humanity is such that we may, in that moment, even exceed the humanity of the wrongdoer.

Retaliation or revenge is sanctioned in many, if not most, cultures. While it may emphasize the agency of the victim and give some level of satisfaction, it remains in the ambit created by the wrongdoer. In doing so, it implicitly accepts the terms dictated by the wrongdoer about the humanity of the victim. It maintains a relationship of conflict and dishonor. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu put it so eloquently in his memoir of his work in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, not forgiving keeps us largely in hostage to the past and to the past deed. There is, as he says, “no future without forgiveness.”

#### TWO DIFFICULT SITUATIONS FOR FORGIVENESS

I would like to explore two situations where engaging in forgiveness has proven to be especially difficult. Both have to do with social forgiveness, where forgiveness needs to be extended to an entire group. The first situation is one that occurs far too frequently. Perhaps the majority of the world’s cultures today are collective (rather than individual) in orientation. The group is more than the sum of the individuals within it; it has



own social reality. An individual's identity is embedded in the identity of the group and is further modulated by one's rank or status within the group. If an offense is done against an individual in the group, the whole group is affected. The "face" and honor of the group have been damaged. Individuals (other than the head or chief of the group) cannot unilaterally undertake forgiveness, even if they are the persons who were offended or harmed. For such an individual to undertake forgiveness would mean betrayal of one's loyalty and adherence to the group. To forgive, then, becomes equivalent to weakness: by forgiving one does not uphold the honor of the group. In the case especially of serious offenses the result is that families carry on the resentment for extended periods of time, even across generations, since neither side can ask for or extend forgiveness. To move toward a process of forgiveness on either side connotes weakness or lack of loyalty.

The second situation is somewhat similar. In this instance, the offense and the consequences of the offense are considered "unforgivable." What makes an offense unforgivable may vary. Usually it is the sheer magnitude of the crime. Can genocide be forgiven? Debate within the Jewish community and beyond has continued for over sixty years about whether the Holocaust against the Jews can be forgiven. In other instances, a crime is unforgivable because it is unclear who is to be forgiven. When the crime has been perpetrated by unknown assailants, to whom should forgiveness be directed? In yet other instances, where the victims have been killed, who would dare forgive on behalf of them? Who can speak for the dead, who have been irrevocably silenced by the deed? Similarly, what if the assailants themselves are dead (as in the case of the young men who perpetrated the 9/11 attacks)? Can one forgive the dead? As we can see, all of what are now called "crimes against humanity" fall under this category.

#### FORGIVENESS AS DEHUMANIZING AND REHUMANIZING

Forgiveness is withheld in both of these settings because of an assumption that forgiveness in some ways dehumanizes us. An offense against us—as individuals or as a group—in some way diminishes our humanity. We are robbed of our right to be treated as a human being, be that defined as a subject with inalienable rights or as someone to be accorded dignity as a

child of God. To be treated in an offensive or harmful manner is to be so diminished.

Cultures that require a response to harm through retaliation or revenge assume that our humanity can only be restored by engaging in some equivalent act of harm against the perpetrator. By acting against the perpetrator in the same way as has been done to us, we show that we have the same capacity and the same power as the one who has harmed us. Such action restores the balance of power, as it were. In collective societies, if a person has been harmed or killed in one group, the same fate must meet someone in the other group. Thus the aggrieved party's "face" or "honor" is restored. (Intercultural psychologists call this "competency face.")

Forgiving is a dehumanizing act in this scenario. If human agency is defined here as the power to act and the power to inflict equal harm, then foregoing the right to do this by forgiving is a form of weakness. It is in effect an admission that one cannot hold up one's side of a power-equilibrium. It makes one appear defenseless, and even extends an invitation to the perpetrator to strike again. In situations of collective societies, to forgive is tantamount to failing to uphold the honor or face of one's family. It is an admission of inherent inferiority.

To forgive what is considered unforgivable is considered a surrender of the one power that victims can hold over perpetrators of massive wrongdoing. By refusing to forgive, the victims (or their survivors) hold the perpetrators in eternal shame for what they have done. The perpetrators bear, as it were, the mark of Cain (cf. Genesis 4:15): they may be spared punishment in order to live in perpetual ignominy. Here once again, being human is defined in terms of holding power over others. In this instance, the power that is held is the refusal to forgive.

In both of these instances, then, power against others or over others becomes the defining characteristic of what it means to be human. Such a use of power makes the wrongful deed the focus of the relationship between the two parties. It maintains itself by freezing the frame in which the deed occurred. The past becomes the present, and anything different for the future is precluded. But by according all one's power to maintaining the deed and its effects one has surrendered one's power also: this time not to the other party, but to the deed. One's humanity gets frozen into this frame. This, too, is dehumanizing in that we are robbed



It is God's capacity to change things,  
to turn around even the most impossible  
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makes us who we are.

of freedom. By deluding ourselves into thinking we are maintaining our freedom by withholding forgiveness we have instead become beholden to the past deed.

The rehumanizing power of forgiveness becomes manifest when we realize that commitment to maintaining resentment is a dead-end option. It gives the illusion of power but is in reality a paralyzing circumscription of it. In this scenario, power can only be exercised by holding on to one thing and not doing anything that might change the scenario in which it is enacted. It reduces our humanity to what we can cling to and what we can unleash in harm to others.

Rehumanization, on the other hand, takes a different route. It begins with an understanding of the human that focuses less on control and more on the capacity to create new possibilities. Agency is defined less by what we can do to others than by what we can do for others. The focus on the very core of human identity is not on what we have and hold, but upon our other-centered character. We are other-centered, first of all, because we do not create ourselves. We have been created by God, and indeed in God's image and likeness. We are most ourselves when we allow God's creating activity to flow through us. It is God's capacity to change things, to turn around even the most impossible of situations that, flowing through us, makes us who we are.

Jesus' opponents were shocked that Jesus claimed to forgive sins. Only God, they opined, can forgive sin (Luke 5:21). In this belief they were correct. When we, in turn, forgive, it is because God has imparted to us the capacity to forgive sin. By forgiving we do not gauge our humanity by the wrongful deed; our horizon is much more capacious than that.

This is most evident in situations where, as bystanders, we are awe-struck by someone's capacity to forgive a terrible act of wrongdoing. This happened on a number of occasions during the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, where the survivors would forgive the wrongdoers, often even before the wrongdoers either acknowledged remorse or asked for forgiveness. Such acts of forgiveness should not be construed as superficial or cheap, or as an attempt by the survivors to garner points for being super-Christians. This kind of forgiveness is not easily achieved. It has to have gone through the dark valley of loss, pain and suffering created by such heinous deeds. But it comes up on the other side in an outlook that is much different from where it started. That other shore where forgiveness can happen is not the mirror image of the situation before the wrongdoing occurred. It is a new place where the power of God flows more freely and more amply.

Seen in this fashion, forgiveness overcomes the dehumanization of the victim not so much by giving back to the victim what has been lost (i.e., power) as by making the victim a "new creation" (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). This is particularly evident if we return to the two difficult situations of forgiveness that were presented above. Both of these situations of social forgiveness—in collective societies and for "unforgivable" crimes—represent a deadlock because of how the rules for resolving them have been set. How being human is understood makes every act of changing the situation an act of dehumanization: humanity is seen as having power over others, and forgiveness is seen as a surrender of that power. Resolution of the situation has to be done in a symmetrical way, undoing the situation by doing the same thing in reverse. Or, in the case of unforgivable wrongdoing, by refusing to cede anything that would change the situation at all.

In secular settings of conflict resolution, the word "forgiveness" is often eschewed because it carries religious connotations. That perception is, in one way, correct. Forgiveness transforms a situation of wrongdoing precisely because it brings something from the outside. It refuses to play by the rules that wrongdoing has set up. That "something" can be seen as coming from a transcendent deity or something indomitable in the human spirit. At any rate, it goes beyond the rules of the game as it has been played up to this point. Those



rules claim the autonomous self at the center; forgiveness starts from an other-centered reality.

## A CULTURE OF FORGIVENESS

If forgiveness arises out of a different reading of what it means to be human and of the ways that situations of wrongdoing are resolved, might one speak of a different framework or even of a culture of forgiveness?

I am using "culture" here in a way similar to that of the late John Paul II, who spoke frequently of a "culture of life" and a "culture of death." In this sense, "culture" means a way of doing things that grows out of a way of viewing the world.

In a recent reflection on the many dimensions of forgiveness, philosopher Charles Griswold makes a helpful distinction between what he terms "perfectionist" and "non-perfectionist" understandings of human nature. The "perfectionist" understanding, to be found in Aristotle and the Epicureans, sees the height of humanity to be reached in the cultivation of virtue to a state of perfection. Such a perfected person, a *megalyopsychos* or "magnanimous" person, need not engage in forgiveness, because such a virtuous person is beyond harm by lesser beings. A non-perfectionist understanding, however, holds that we live in an imperfect (and Christians would say, fallen) world that calls for reapportioning rights, extending and receiving apologies, and repeated efforts to begin anew. In such a world, forgiveness is necessary and must be implemented frequently if any moral improvement is to be hoped for.

The situations of collective face-saving and of unforgivable sin represent in some measure a perfectionist response to a non-perfectionist world. To be beyond extending or accepting forgiveness or to put the possibility of forgiveness beyond the pale of human possibility bespeak an ideal world that does not exist. Claiming to be beyond forgiveness is at the least an effort to ally oneself with such a world. To imagine oneself to be in such an invulnerable or impermeable state ends up with one expecting that nothing will ever change for the better. Those who believe in an imper-

fect world admit failure as part of the human condition. Such a stance does not gainsay the importance of group honor nor does it trivialize the overwhelming power of mass suffering. But it believes that the power to overcome such daunting obstacles lies not in ourselves but in some point beyond ourselves—but always mediated through and by us. It is that mediation that constitutes genuine human agency in the face of wrongdoing.

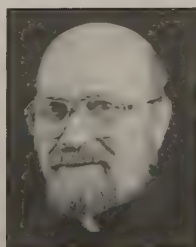
With such an understanding of our world forgiveness, then, becomes not a dehumanizing act but rather an act of genuine rehumanization. It rehumanizes us by calling us into participation in something greater than ourselves in which we become more the image and likeness of a creative and forgiving God. It is this other-centeredness upon God that not only transforms us but can create a culture in which social space is accorded to the wrongdoer to experience the possibility of remorse and the need for forgiveness. In short, a rehumanizing of the wrongdoer as well as of the victim is possible.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Griswold, C. L. *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Schreiter, R. J. *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

Tutu, D. *No Future without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday, 1998.



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# COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT

## AS A WAY TO RECONCILIATION

William A. Barry, S.J.

As I begin this article I have just prayed the March intention of the Apostleship of Prayer: "That all may understand the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation between individuals and peoples and that the Church may spread Christ's love." When March began, the editors of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT were making proximate preparations for printing the summer issue whose theme was forgiveness between individuals and beginning to focus on this issue whose theme is forgiveness and reconciliation in and between groups. It seemed providential that all over the world people were praying this prayer. We hope that these issues of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT are one answer to this world-wide prayer.

Those who prayed the prayer in March, no doubt, thought of all the conflicts raging at that time between civil groups. The world, after all, was reeling from small and large wars and unrest ranging from Afghanistan and Iraq to Darfur, Kenya, Kosovo and Tibet. They may also have thought of the animosity against Christians so evident at that time. In India and in Iraq and other countries Christian churches and Christians themselves were under attack; in Mosul, Iraq, Archbishop Rahho had been kidnapped and then killed in cold blood. In the United States the candidacy of Senator Barack Obama saw the surfacing of the racial tensions that have bedeviled the country since its founding as a country that countenanced slavery. The candidacy of Senator Hillary Clinton brought to the fore issues of gender bias and whether a female candidate for the presidency or, for that matter, for any office heretofore the exclusive domain of males, is held to a higher standard. What many who prayed this prayer may not have adverted to was the need for forgiveness and reconciliation between the Christian churches and within the Roman Catholic Church itself. Many Christians recognize that the divisions between their churches are a scandal, yet the pace toward forgiveness and reconciliation seems glacial. Within the Roman Catholic Church itself the divisions are no less scandalous. I am talking about the rancor and downright hostility

between Catholics regarding who is faithful to the letter and spirit of the Second Vatican Council, a division that cuts through so many Catholic groupings, parishes, communities of the same religious congregations, priests of the same diocese (or parish), Catholic women and their priests and bishops. I am also thinking of the negativity felt toward hierarchical authority by many women and by many homosexually oriented people. As I prayed the prayer I was conscious of the need for forgiveness and reconciliation in these religious groups as well as in civil groups.

In this article I want to suggest a method derived from the spirituality of the discernment of spirits that might prove helpful to some groups of Roman Catholics who are experiencing difficulty in moving beyond their mutual fears and open or covert animosity.

### REDISCOVERING COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT

In the 1970s when Jesuits and others were rediscovering the individually directed *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola, the discernment of spirits took on a new urgency. Individuals began to take seriously their experience of God and to wonder how to decide what, in the welter of their experiences, was from God, what not. Articles and books began to appear describing and theorizing about the Rules for Discernment of Spirits contained in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Jesuits also began to pay attention to the example of Ignatius and his first companions who engaged in an extended period of communal discernment that led to their decision to ask the Pope to allow them to found a new order, the Society of Jesus. Both of these rediscoveries led some to offer communal workshops to groups who wanted God's help to make critical decisions in those heady days after Vatican II. William J. Connolly, S.J., of the Center for Religious Development in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was one of these pioneers, and I worked with him on a few such workshops and then with others, including the late Joseph E. McCormick, S.J.



My experience was not vast, but broad enough to come to some tentative conclusions. I noticed that groups would have a good experience during the workshop but that the decisions arrived at either seemed relatively innocuous or were not easily implemented. A couple of experiences made me wonder whether the reason for the lack of real fruit from these workshops, many of which lasted five days, had to do with the absence of some of the presuppositions for a successful discernment of God's desires for a particular group. In *Letting God Come Close* I included "Toward Communal Discernment," based on an earlier article. In it I wrote this:

Communal discernment presupposes before all else that those who will engage in it have experienced the discernment of spirits in themselves. That is, each individual must have engaged in a process of contemplative prayer such as that proposed in the *Spiritual Exercises* and have experienced the movements of the different "spirits" and have discerned which movements were of God, which not. Secondly, communal discernment presupposes that the individuals can and will communicate their experiences in prayer and in prayerful reflection to others. The ability to do so cannot be presupposed since many of us were brought up in a tradition where such communication was not only not encouraged but often enough actively discouraged. The recovery of the individually directed retreat and the development of a type of spiritual direction which requires the communication of religious experience are giving us the tools for the kind of communication communal discernment requires. But the willingness to communicate experience must also be present, and this is often the rock upon which attempts at communal discernment shatter.

I then went on to indicate that the willingness to communicate one's actual experience requires trust between the members of the group, trust that everyone is sincerely trying to find what God wants, not just interested in getting what I want, trust that what I say will be listened to respectfully and with an open heart even if what I experience is different than what the others experience.

In other words, I concluded that for communal discernment to succeed groups need something analogous to what an individual needs for individual discernment. In order to engage truthfully in discernment to discover God's desire for me I need to have a real trust in God based on the experience of God's "everlasting love" and God's forgiveness of my sins. If I do not have this experience-based trust, I will hedge my bets in my relationship with God; I will not be completely open to hear what God has to say about the direction of my life. In a group hoping to discern communally how God wants them to proceed as a group such trust in God must be present in the individuals. But additionally the individuals in the group must trust that the other members of the group have the same dispositions and sincerely want to find God's desire for the group. When groups have a history of open or covert mistrust, communal discernment is impossible unless the members can come to a real trust in one another as sincerely wanting to find God's dream for this group.

#### THE PROCESS WE USED

What follows is a description of some of the processes my colleagues and I have used to help people in groups to overcome their fears and to entrust themselves more to one another. I have freely borrowed from the chapter referred to earlier.

First we explain our role as the facilitators by an analogy to the role of the spiritual director. The spiritual director helps individuals to recognize what they want from God, to make these known to God, and to put themselves into a receptive position so that God's response may be heard. Spiritual directors do not manufacture desires or prayer experiences for those they direct but help them to notice what is happening in the relationship with God, to discern what leads toward God and what leads away from God, and to decide what to do about the discernment. So too the facilitators of the group try to help the group to articulate what it, as a group, wants from God and to help the members to approach God in prayer with that desire. Here it is important to remind the individuals that they are asking God to relate to them precisely as members of this group with the group's desire, e.g., to know that God has hopes for us as a group. Just as individuals ask God



for what they desire, trusting that God has their good at heart, so too the individuals in this group context approach God with the group's desire trusting that God has the good of this group at heart.

When a group of church members, say a parish group, a congregational chapter, or a group comprised of members of a religious congregation of sisters and their bishop, come together to try to find some common path in their work or living together, it might be wise to have an outside facilitator or perhaps two facilitators who can guide their deliberations in the way suggested here. Such facilitators, however, need to be selected not for their expertise in techniques (although some expertise is needed) but for their trust that God does have hopes for this group and will communicate those hopes to the individuals in the group through their individual and communal prayer and their interactions with one another.

We explain the general structure for each session. As facilitators at each session we will suggest a way for the members to approach God in personal prayer with the desire that God communicate to each one precisely as a member of this group. After the prayer period is over, they return to the group. The facilitators then help them to report to one another as much or as little as they wish of what happened during the prayer. Just as the spiritual director of an individual helps the person to notice and articulate what happened as much as possible without judging it, so too the facilitators of a group ask the group to try to listen without judgment to the experiences shared. Indeed, since the assumption of such group sharing is that we are hoping to hear what God is saying to us as a group, these periods of sharing are approached, as far as possible, with the same contemplative attitude one hopes to have in private prayer. What happens in the sharing then gives the facilitators and the group something to work on for the next session.

Also in the beginning, we point out that the process is a slow one of growing in trust in God's hope for the group and in one another. They already trust God, but they probably have not thought much about God's desires and hopes for the group as such. And most groups need to develop a trust in one another as deeply prayerful and honestly searching for God's will for the group. Communal discernment means that each member of the group trusts that God will reveal God's hopes for the group through their individual prayer and through their sharing of the fruits of that prayer. To engage in this process I must trust that all the others are sincerely praying and trying to remain open to discern God's will. After all, my future may be on the line if I am willing to abide by the group's decision.

We usually structured the day into three sessions, morning, afternoon and evening. The whole group

gathers at the beginning of each session, and we give them some orientation for private prayer. Each one prays for forty-five minutes to an hour and then takes a few minutes for reflection. If the group is less than ten, all the sharing sessions are in one group. If it is larger, we break it up into groups of ten or less for the sharing and ask that someone summarize for the whole group in a report. Each session, therefore, lasts at least two and one-half hours. As the process goes on, we may have to vary the structure according to what is needed. For example, at the beginning of a session we may need to canvass the group to find out what their desires are.

Some groups begin the discernment process with much good will toward one another. Even so the individuals will still need time to develop the deeper trust in one another and God that this process entails. Suppose that such a group's purpose is to discover how they might best use their talent apostolically. Their numbers have declined, and they feel strained and overworked and realize that they can no longer continue to do all the work that they have been doing. We might suggest for the first period of prayer that they use a text like Isaiah 43:1-7:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.  
When you pass through the waters, I will  
be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not  
overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire, you shall not  
be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.  
For I am the Lord your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior,  
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Because you are precious in my eyes,  
and honored, and I love you,  
I give people in return for you,  
nations in exchange for your life.  
Do not fear, for I am with you.

The Israelites heard these consoling words when they were in exile, their temple destroyed and their hopes at their lowest. We suggest that they ask God to give them a sense of hearing these words as applying to them as members of this group.

They then pray privately for forty-five minutes or so and afterwards return to the group where each one is asked to share whatever he or she wishes of what happened during the prayer. For most groups such an "ice breaker" is reassuring and the variety of experi-

ences enlightening. In a felt way they realize how sincere and faith-filled each one is. They are often surprised at how easy and enjoyable it is to talk about prayer with one another. Depending on how this first session goes, we might either suggest a repetition for the next session or suggest that they ask God to help them to know God's hope for them as a group. When we do move on to the latter point, we suggest private prayer in which each one asks God to reveal God's dream for them as a group.

During the group meetings we remind them to listen to one another contemplatively and to note inner reactions as they listen. If they feel antipathy to what one member is saying, for example, they might want to ask God's help to see things from that person's perspective. After the group has articulated its sense of God's vision and dream for them as a group, they might be ready to ask God's help to discover what blocks them from realizing the dream. Now the hard part begins because they will be addressing neuralgic issues that may bring to light resentments, mistrust, and other "negative" emotions. The facilitators begin to earn their keep.

#### OVERCOMING MISTRUST AND ANGER

Any group that has a history together has got some bodies buried somewhere. We have been talking about groups who begin the process with much good will toward one another. Often enough, however, groups do not begin with much good will and trust. This is the case in many of the conflicts in the Church today. Then the negative feelings may have to be addressed even earlier.

One group Joe McCormack and I worked with displayed so much anger, resentment, suspicion, and misunderstanding at the very first session that we wondered whether we had opened Pandora's Box. We had no time to confer as to what to do. For some reason the scene of the apostles in the upper room prior to the appearance of the risen Jesus came to mind. In some fear and trembling I pointed out that their reality had surfaced rather quickly and then suggested that they might feel as the apostles did after the crucifixion when they boarded themselves up in the upper room. I asked them to imagine the apostles' feelings of guilt and anger and suspicion and fear. And into their midst came Jesus saying "Peace be with you." I suggested that they might want to spend an hour in prayer with this text (John 20:19-23) the next morning and then gather again as a group. When they returned to the group the next day, the atmosphere had noticeably shifted. Where before accusations and angry denunciations of

others prevailed, now each one spoke of his own fears and failings and at the same time voiced a trust that God would be with them. They had not yet reached the promised land, but they were on the way toward becoming a group that eventually might be able to engage in communal discernment.

In a 1972 monograph John Futrell makes a perceptive comment: "A community must have achieved the fruit of the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* as a community in order to begin true communal spiritual discernment" (p. 169). He does not spell out what that might mean, but I believe that this prerequisite is crucial, and in at least one case, I believe, I saw a group achieve that fruit. A description of what happened might explain the reference to the first week of the *Exercises*. It was a group of male religious who were chapter delegates. They asked Joe McCormack and me to facilitate a four and a half day process that would help them toward being more discerning and open during the chapter which would follow. The congregation was reeling from a heavy financial blow and from departures that had left them demoralized, angry, and suspicious. Among the members of the group were some whom the others held responsible for their problems, especially their financial problems. Early in our sessions feelings of anger, suspicion, guilt, and helplessness emerged. The first two days were stormy, but we could sense a gradual growth in trust. As one man said: "We have thought the unthinkable and said the unsayable."

Toward the end of the second day we summarized the situation in this fashion. "You sense yourselves as broken, needy, helpless, and sinful precisely as members of this congregation and as chapter delegates. A number of you have identified with Simon the Pharisee who scorned Jesus for letting the sinful woman wash his feet. Some of you have voiced resentment at being put into the position of picking up the pieces of a mess caused by others. Some have expressed fears that as a group you will not have the courage to make the necessary decisions. Some of you fear that even God cannot change you. And yet you have also desired healing, have desired that Jesus make you brothers again. We suggest that you present yourselves to Jesus as you are and ask him for what you want. Perhaps you might want to do a repetition of Luke 7:36-50 or you might want to use the washing of the feet in John 13." We also suggested speaking to Jesus on the cross and using the triple colloquy of the First Week of the *Exercises* (*Spiritual Exercises*, n. 63).

The sharing after this period of prayer was very emotional and very honest. One man asked with tears for the forgiveness of the group. Another reported



As a group they had allowed themselves to experience and acknowledge before God and one another their brokenness, their sinfulness, and their powerlessness to overcome these obstacles to unity.

emptiness in prayer and asked the group to pray for him. A couple of men said that the desire for healing was growing in them. Most of the others reported consolation and a sense of being healed. Tears were shed. At the end of the sharing they broke up into dyads for the sacrament of reconciliation. The next day men continued to ask one another for reconciliation. We spent the last two days focusing on Jesus' relationship with his apostles in the gospel of Mark. At the end of the process they felt hopeful and much more trusting as they prepared to enter their chapter.

As a result of what I want to label a group "First Week experience" they seemed able to dream and to hope again as a group. As a group they had allowed themselves to experience and acknowledge before God and one another their brokenness, their sinfulness, and their powerlessness to overcome these obstacles to unity. In addition, they were able to ask God's help to become reconciled to one another. They had done as a group something analogous to what an individual does in the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*. My suspicion is that underlying many of the conflicts between Catholics of good will are such acknowledged or unacknowledged negative feelings that we have never thought to bring to God for healing in some communal fashion. Perhaps a process such as the one I have just outlined can be a help to move beyond mutual suspicion and recrimination to healing and reconciliation.

## CONCLUSION

If spiritual directors need to have great trust in God as their directees face some of the very painful and

harrowing experiences sometimes associated with the process of conversion, such trust is even more imperative for those who facilitate groups in the manner suggested. It is all too easy to gloss over serious divisions in a group, to let sleeping dogs lie, as it were. It is all too easy to present techniques that only can work if prerequisites of trust and contemplative prayer are present. It is also all too easy to give up hope that God can work wonders even on a group that seems at first hopelessly divided. This kind of giving up of hope in God's power is not easily acknowledged. It can be covered over by a judgment that some in the group are just not giving themselves to the process. I have never been a facilitator alone precisely because I feel the need for another so that together we can remind one another to pray ourselves and to entrust the group to God and to trust the good will of all the members of the group in spite of everything. After all, we try to say to one another, they have invited us to help them to become a discerning group; so they must have some hope in God who has called them together. A group is close to becoming discerning when the members can say, as one man did, "During the Spiritual Exercises I came to trust deeply that Jesus had a dream for me. Now I believe that he has a dream for us."

In our beloved Church today there are many deep divisions among us. God wants to help us to become reconciled. Perhaps these thoughts occasioned by reflection on communal discernment can be useful as we look for ways to allow God to bring about such reconciliation.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Barry, W. A. "Toward Communal Discernment," chapter 11 of *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001. (I have borrowed liberally from this chapter for this article.)

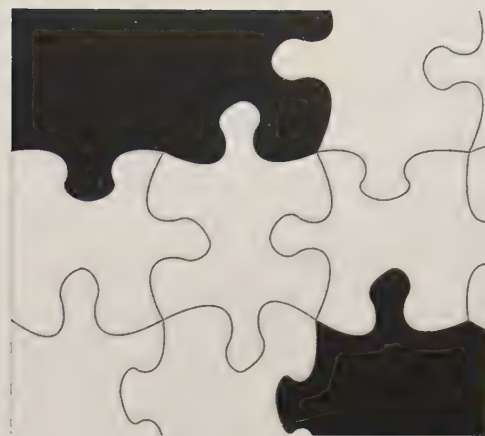
Futrell, J. C. "Common Discernment: Reflections on Experience," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 4/5 (November, 1972).



# RELATIONS

## BETWEEN AFRICAN-AMERICANS AND WHITES IN THE UNITED STATES

Gregory C. Chisholm, S.J.



Our symbols have suffered considerably in the post-modern age. For an emergent, educated and independent citizenry everything from wedding rings to crucifixes must be accompanied by narrative explanation to be understood. The narrative itself has become a primary means of communicating meaning. The Office of the President and the Bishop's *cathedra* no longer point to a reality beyond themselves whose value is agreed upon by many Americans and Catholics. Flags and crosses have a lot more work to do than just hang there. Instead, we must "tell a story" so that meaning, value, truth and beauty may be revealed.

A fortunate consequence of the post-modern era is that the concept of race, i.e., what it means to be black or white, does not bear the symbolic weight of an earlier era. This is particularly true for young men and women raised and educated in an atmosphere which has celebrated diversity. In the history of the United States the possibility of broad, genuine and substantial communication between persons of different races is happening now for perhaps the first time.

### OBAMA AND THE STORY OF RACE IN AMERICA

Several months ago when Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama told the story of race in America, he revealed the chasm which continues to separate blacks and whites, even as many Americans of all races hope for a better tomorrow. Obama, a black man with a black wife and daughters, does not symbolize any popular demeaning image of black men. He also does not believe in an American government which symbolizes oppression worldwide and intolerance at home. His narrative offered a telescoped histo-

ry of the anger, pain and fear with which black Americans have lived. Obama's story was equally honest about the privilege, superiority and intolerance which white Americans accept without thinking, a circumstance which he has been in a unique position to observe. Obama leaves one with the impression that, while he knows the wrong which privilege has fostered and knows that it must not be encouraged, he cannot turn his back on white Americans any more than he can reject the family which raised him. On the other hand his own journey and his fatherhood of two young girls who are the descendents of slaves seem to require that he honor the history and aspirations of black Americans.

Historian William Edward Burghardt DuBois characterized black yearning under the pressure of a white worldview as a "double consciousness." In *The Souls of Black Folk*, written in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, DuBois calls black aspiration and white hegemony two "warring ideals" which threaten to tear the black man apart. Yet Barack Obama embodies the transformation of war into dialogue. He will not let go, will not stop the engagement until change has come. Thus Obama represents a new range of possibilities for interracial and intercultural communication. He is radically honest about both black anger and white privilege, yet he will not let either impede the possibility of communication or the possibility of creating a government of liberty and justice for all. This may indicate the dawning of a new instance of American leadership which grasps entirely the yearning of the marginalized and the power of the privileged.

Since the Civil Rights era, the needs of many Americans who seek freedom have come to light. American women, Natives, Latinos, Asians, gays and



lesbians, the elderly and the handicapped have also sought entrance into genuine conversation with privilege. The black struggle, which has almost defined America's relationship with the marginalized for 300 years, has been a template for other marginalized Americans. The emergence of a new reality for blacks in America will be a milestone for marginalized people everywhere.

Virgilio Elizando in *Galilean Journey: The Mexican American Promise* employed the metaphor of the "mestizo" to indicate how Jesus of Nazareth, a marginalized Jew raised in the cultural borderlands of Galilee, offers a new conception of salvation for both Jews and Greeks. Jesus' life embodies many narratives that communicate the truth of God's action in the world. Christianity forges something new and energetic for all without one cultural reality denying or destroying the other. There is genuine hope for all when culture is no longer an impediment to communication, evangelization and salvation.

#### BLACKS IN THE U.S. CATHOLIC CHURCH

There is no contemporary instance of "mestizo" leadership in the American Catholic church which offers hope for a new quality of communication between whites and blacks, or by extension between the powerful and the marginalized. Blacks are more marginal in the Catholic Church than in the American society. The long and troubled relationship between black and white Catholics is described very well in *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North*. Even the advent of Catholic Interracial Councils, influenced by John LaFarge, S.J., and William Markoe, S.J., and begun in the 1930s, reflect a problematic attempt to control the character of interracial communication in the American church. The Federated Colored Catholics begun at the end of World War I by Dr. Thomas Wyatt Turner, a black professor of biology from Howard University, attempted to galvanize black Catholics to work in support of change in the American church. LaFarge and Markoe, while initially supportive of the Federated Colored Catholics, did not see black self help as critically necessary. A strong antagonism developed between Markoe, who advocated for change from a black viewpoint, and Turner, who advocated for black development. The power of the Jesuits' financial support and their influence among the hierarchy ruled the day. The Federated Colored Catholics were left without the means to continue and ended ignominiously as the Catholic Interracial Councils began. [See *History of Black Catholics* by Cyprian Davis.]

Few Catholic bishops come to mind who fully grasp the anger of black Americans, while at the same time acknowledging the prerogatives of white privilege. [See "James Cone and Recent Catholic Episcopal Teaching on Racism," Bryan Massengale, *Theological Studies*, Vol. 61, 2000]. Few Catholic theologians, religious superiors or lay leaders have articulated a way forward in American Catholic reflection, which envisions a future free of racism and segregation. Urban ministry becomes the code word for all things black and marginal. Life and family ministry speak the language of what is of greatest concern to many American Catholics. These, of course, are often code words for the fight against abortion and the cultural threat which homosexuals and lesbians pose.

The narratives of Hurricane Katrina survivors don't convey profound truths about inequity to most Catholics although a progressive Catholic movement like "Call To Action" made the subject of racism a principal focus of its 2007 national conference. The exuberance of Rev. Jeremiah Wright and the positive response of his largely black congregation don't seem to tell a story that most Catholics want to hear: that Jesus Christ is on the side of the oppressed. Genuine communication between whites and blacks would require an acknowledgement of the gaps between the lives of black and white Americans. There would also need to be some acceptance that black Americans are often skeptical of government and churches which are predominantly controlled by white people. Such control has historically worked to the disadvantage of blacks.

#### CHALLENGES TO INTERRACIAL COMMUNICATION

The inability effectively to overcome racial differences in communication is, of course, not solely a problem of white Americans. There are black Americans, for example, who live within the confines of black social circles, who reside in black neighborhoods and who worship in black churches. These may encounter white Americans in public transportation or in the workplace or in commercial centers, but no communication of significance occurs there. A congregant of a former church where I was pastor is a middle aged black woman who grew up in the south and moved to the West Coast as an adult. She remembers quite clearly that there was no social commerce between blacks and whites in her New Orleans neighborhood. This was in spite of her father having a job which guaranteed secure economic status for his family. Historically the practices of "Jim Crow," enforced in the American south and accepted in the industrialized



north, guaranteed that most blacks would have only perfunctory interaction with most whites. Certainly there would be minimal opportunity of establishing peer relationships across racial lines.

While the Jim Crow laws and practices are no longer in place, there remain large numbers of blacks who continue to live the segregated lives which were common for black Americans prior to 1970. Rarely is this a positive choice, as it might be for black academics and black professionals who return to Harlem, for example, to reclaim the black middle class social milieu which once thrived there. The black middle class has achieved the wherewithal to live in places of their own choosing with the accompanying opportunity of entering into multi-racial peer relationships. The end of "redlining" and the end of "restricted covenants" largely opened doors for those black Americans with the money, the talent and the desire. Left behind were those who either did not want to leave the traditional black neighborhoods or who couldn't leave those neighborhoods. Hip Hop music and styles were born among those who remained. Crack cocaine wreaked havoc everywhere but had a particularly devastating effect on segregated black neighborhoods and the families living therein. Gang activity, guns and violence have become common occurrences in historically black sections of most major East Coast cities along with Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Oakland and St. Louis. Churches, barber shops and beauty shops are the institutions which have endured the changes in black neighborhoods. The segregated and the departed middle class often meet together in Sunday pews or under hair dryers. Rarely, however, are white Americans seen in these venues, thus rarely do black Americans living in segregated neighborhoods encounter white Americans. And rarer still is the person who ventures forth from segregated neighborhoods to build or sustain relationships with white Americans.

A serious challenge to effective interracial communication of the sort represented by the creative energy of Barack Obama is found also among black Americans who refuse to acknowledge the legacy of American racism. I have a good friend who is black and middle aged. He does not accept the impact that racism in the Catholic Church has had on the relationship between blacks and the hierarchy in his diocese. He knows well the history in which black candidates to the priesthood, though many, never made it to ordination. He knows that an earlier bishop in his diocese refused to support fair housing legislation and efforts against job discrimination in his very Catholic city. My friend freely admits that in his interaction with white

Catholics, white priests and his bishop he prefers to see their communication as a *tabula rasa*, unblemished by the sins of the past. He also admits a frustration with black Americans who are poor and live in troubled neighborhoods and populate the prisons in disproportionate numbers.

This sort of naiveté makes for pleasant interactions between blacks and whites. The black pain mentioned above never has to be taken seriously in such a fantasy, and the white privilege never needs to be confronted. Of course this sort of attitude, while cordial, is not a basis on which any genuine communication can be built. There is a disturbing rejection of the self which is suggested by his behavior.

In many ways this phenomenon is a continuation of a classic behavioral characteristic well known in black American life. Black Americans are used to black men and women who choose to "pass" as white. The classic cases are represented by persons who are the product of interracial unions but who appear white in their complexion or facial features or the texture of their hair. As documented by Albert Foley, Bishop James Healy, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ordinary of Portland, Maine, passed as white. His brother Rev. Patrick Healy, S.J., the second founder of Georgetown University, did the same thing, preferring to live a life psychologically and physically distinct from others of African descent. Louisiana Catholics of African descent are used to members of their families, who are not easily identifiable as black, disappearing into the white world or "passing." Variations on this theme have affected black Americans since emancipation in that many have attempted to change themselves physically to present features closer in form to white Americans. Some blacks have simply adapted psychologically to the power and effect of white Americans on national norms. Some see the world as white Americans do with a concomitant attitude of superiority to other blacks. Some will value what white Americans value with an associated demeaning of styles and practices common among blacks.

#### YOUNG PEOPLE – HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Nevertheless there is hope to be found among contemporary white and black Americans. Among younger black men and women who have been raised in my parishes and have attended American universities, I have noticed more encouraging behavior distinct from either the segregated or the assimilated sort mentioned above. They seem better able to enter into meaningful peer relationships with younger white Americans, as well as Latino, Asian and Native Americans than their



elders. There is a clear acceptance among multi-racial sets of friends of the ethnic character of each, and race does not define roles or attitudes in any *a priori* sense. Ethnic differences do not limit the range of communication to the cordial, nor do those differences deny the legitimacy of cultural anger. Communication in these circles of peers even extends to the possibility of intimate interracial relationships. They constitute almost a new instance of race relations, possibly born of a conscious and deliberate attention in our country to the value of diversity in educational settings. Barack Obama channels the creative energy that these social circles, these communities, represent. He reflects what they most value, relationships based not on what color means symbolically but based on the narrative of the life of the one who would be friend, partner or spouse. These social circles seem to embrace the tension of black American anger and white American privilege without being destroyed by it.

I believe the possibility of genuine communication exists where communities can be formed. What has become natural for the young can be fostered among older Americans. I had the opportunity several years ago to join a fact-finding mission to Colombia, South America. The purpose of the mission was to understand how the drug-related wars between right-wing paramilitary groups and left-wing guerillas affect Afro-Colombian communities there. Afro-Colombians are nearly 25% of the Colombian population. I was the lone Catholic on the delegation, and I was sponsored by the Society of Jesus. The largest coherent participation on the delegation came from Trinity United Church of Christ, which at the time had Rev. Jeremiah Wright as its pastor. The church members from Trinity were of varied backgrounds: ministers, bankers, social activists and mothers. There were both men and women. There was at least one openly gay man among them. They were also a multi-racial group of white and black persons. These were not young people. They were a middle-aged community of Christians which had clearly been inspired by an understanding and appreciation for the realities of race in America. Theirs seemed to be an engaged and honest community taking seriously both black anger and white privilege without being torn apart by either. The creative tension resulted in something affirmative being done by a Christian community on behalf of oppressed blacks in South America.

Although I have not directly witnessed the creation of an equally creative multi-racial community of

Catholics which keeps in tension both black anger and white privilege, I believe that such communities of believers are possible. I am at least inspired by Catholic universities like the University of San Francisco where student life is constituted by various textures of ethnicity, race, gender, religious belief, age and sexual orientation. When the Pharisees opposed Jesus' outreach to sinners and those on the margins of Jewish society, Jesus said to his disciples, "blessed is the man who finds no obstacle in me" (Matthew 11:6). There is some reason to hope that Catholics in America will arrive at a day when they find no obstacle in an effort which fosters genuine interracial communication.

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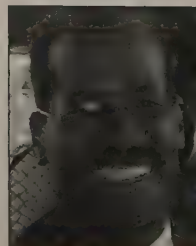
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# The “Hard Men” as **PEACEMAKERS** in Northern Ireland

Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.

**I**t should not surprise us to find that the militants of Northern Ireland, Republican and Loyalist alike, were the ones who initiated changes that brought about the peace and reconciliation that we see in that province, nor that the thinking for the peace process was done in prison. These “hard men” experienced most acutely the “troubles” that afflicted Northern Ireland and consequently had the strongest motivation to resolve them. Recall that in South Africa, peace initiatives came from Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned. You may know that currently in the Middle East, the most hopeful thing happening is the work of Marwan Barghout, a Palestinian prisoner who is uniting the different Palestinian factions around the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. This article tells the story of how peace came about in Northern Ireland, even amid all the horrors of this bitter conflict.

## THE EDUCATION OF GUSTY SPENCE

Gusty Spence entered the Northern Ireland prison system in 1965. A former soldier, he helped to form the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in the mid-’60s. At the prompting of some Unionist politicians whom he will not name, he and his colleagues murdered Catholics rather at random, believing that they were thus defending queen and country.

These were the years of the Second Vatican Council and, in the fresh new spirit of ecumenism, Northern Irish Protestants and Catholics were very tentatively meeting one another, sharing cups of tea with somewhat brittle politeness. Catholics had embarked at the same time on a civil rights campaign demanding equitable access to public housing. The champions of the old Protestant Supremacy took alarm and foresaw the overturning of the system if the ancient hedges against Catholics were not kept intact.



History, as Gusty had learned it in the state schools, included the triumph of Good King Billy—William of Orange—over the Catholics at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, but all the rest of history happened on the island of Britain rather than in Ireland.

Using the rudimentary education doled out by the state schools, Gusty, incarcerated in Belfast's Crumlin Road jail, asked for books to familiarize himself with Irish history. History, as Gusty had learned it in the state schools, included the triumph of Good King Billy—William of Orange—over the Catholics at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, but all the rest of history happened on the island of Britain rather than in Ireland.

The prison governor rather reluctantly allowed Gusty those books. As Gusty explains it, the governor thought he and his companions were bad enough without an education and would be worse with it. As Gusty learned about the relations of Catholic and Protestant communities in past eras of Irish history, he assumed leadership among the other prisoners. Most were Protestants, since few Catholics came into the prisons before the outbreaks of 1969. Gusty lent out his books and insisted that the other prisoners learn as he had learned.

#### A NON-AGGRESSION PACT

When the prison was flooded with Catholic prisoners, especially after the roundup of IRA suspects for internment without trial on August 9, 1971, it became clear that the rival bodies of Catholic and Protestant prisoners were a danger to each other. Gusty, as Officer Commanding (OC) of the Protestant paramilitaries, sought out the OCs of the two conflicting Irish Republican Armies (IRA), Billy McKee of the Provisional IRA and P.J. Monaghan of the Official IRA, and agreed with them on a non-aggression pact within the prison. This was of vital importance, not only for their safety, but as the first seed of the agreements that would eventually bring an end to the bloody conflict in the whole province.

The prisoners, Catholic and Protestant alike, had two major interests in common. Early in 1972 they agreed on a plan to get 1) a system of segregation in the prison for their protection from one another, and 2) a special status to distinguish those who were in prison for political militancy from criminals. Their approach was cooperative. The Ulster Defense Association (UDA) organized street demonstrations outside the jail. Catholic politicians of the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP) lobbied government to grant these two demands, and the Provisional IRA prisoners inside the jail went on a prolonged hunger strike. Government agreed not to call these men "political prisoners" but to grant them what was called "Special Category" status, and the Catholic and Protestant prisoners were given separate quarters in the jail.

This segregation, however, was not enough. Provisional and Official IRA prisoners were still a danger to each other. The Protestant prisoners, at Gusty Spence's suggestion, agreed to double up in their cells so that the Official IRA prisoners could be moved out of the Provisional IRA's area and housed in a section where communication could be maintained between them and the Protestants.

The Crumlin Road jail by now was bursting. Northern Ireland had been a law-abiding place where there were few ordinary criminals to lock up until the political breakdown filled up the jail. Prisoners were kept on ships in the harbor, with some spectacular prison breaks. The authorities consequently moved all the Special Category prisoners from the city to a hastily improvised prison camp on an abandoned military airstrip called Long Kesh. There they lived in barbed-wire enclosures, each with four Nissen huts, which the Catholics called "cages" and the Protestants called "compounds." Gusty Spence, still intent on building relations with the Catholic prisoners, repeatedly "went to the wire," went to the fences separating the quarters of different kinds of prisoners, explaining that he wanted to learn the Irish language. In fact he wanted to learn about the Catholic prisoners themselves.

#### UDA AND IRA: TWO VERY DIFFERENT GROUPS

It was at this time that I began to know the Northern Irish scene myself, in the summer of 1972. I made a supposition, as I approached the various militant groups, that I was not dealing with psychopaths but with men who had enlisted in military groups, at



great personal risk, for the protection of their own communities. I could disagree with the violence and seek alternatives to it, but I had to respect these people.

Encountering Catholic and Protestant militants were very different experiences. Every meeting with UDA or UVF leadership tended to begin with professions that "We have done terrible things and must find other ways," while the IRA came always convinced that "We are soldiers, and do what we must in a war situation." It must have been frustrating for them to deal with me because, as Catholics, they were always anxious to hear that they were the defenders in a just war. I would never concede that to them, on the grounds that I did not find they were designing an Ireland that would be livable for the Protestants as well as for themselves.

#### DIPLOCK COURTS AND PRISONERS' REACTIONS

British government, having seen the dismal failure of an attempt at negotiation during a cease-fire in July 1972, came to regret the concession of "Special Category" status to the prisoners. Lord Kenneth Diplock headed a commission to design a system to convict them all as ordinary criminals, despite the danger to witnesses and juries if they were put on ordinary trial. In the Diplock courts, every prisoner was tried, without jury, before a single judge. Testimony of a single police or army officer sufficed for conviction, without cross-examination, but special value was placed on confession by the prisoners themselves. The system was an invitation to obtain these confessions by torture, and reports of abuses were rife. Government was intent on classifying all the prisoners as criminals, abandoning all effort at a negotiated settlement. An anti-criminalization campaign, consequently, was the hallmark of prisoner resistance for the next several years.

A new prison was built alongside the cages/compounds at Long Kesh, known as the "H-Blocks" because the cell-blocks formed H-shaped buildings. The new prison was officially renamed "The Maze." (Prisoners would never consent to call it other than "The Kesh.") In the face of bitter conditions within the prison, the IRA prisoners, still under the leadership of Billy McKee for the Provisionals and J.P. Monaghan for the Officials, resolved to burn the prison. Gusty Spence, still leader of all the Protestant prisoners, told them he would agree only if he saw evidence of new

brutality, but he was not convinced.

When the brutally violent night of the fire came, Gusty converted the Protestant compounds into first-aid stations for the many injured, both IRA and guards, and in this way built a new strong bond between the prisoners from various sides.

Resistance to criminalization next took the form of the "Blanket Protest." IRA prisoners—not all of them but several hundred volunteers selected from the many prisoners—refused to wear the prison uniforms which they took to be the badge of criminal status. Instead, confined to their cells and deprived of all privileges, they wrapped their naked bodies in their blankets. After quite some time of this, the guards refused to permit the men "on the blanket" to go down the corridor of the cell-block to the toilets unless they would don their uniforms for it. The "Dirty Protest" began thus, as the prisoners smeared their excrement on the walls and ceilings of their cells. So intolerable was the situation that eventually it led to the calling of hunger strikes, an unsuccessful one lasting from October 1980 to just before Christmas, and then the celebrated hunger strike of 1981, in which ten prisoners fasted to their deaths, the first of them Bobbie Sands who, before his death, was chosen, in a by-election, as a member of the British parliament: Bobbie Sands, MP.

The hunger strike was accompanied by violence all over Ireland, north and south. It ended with an apparent defeat for the prisoners, but all their demands were then granted and the prison entered a new phase.

#### PLANNING THE PEACE

A special feature of British prisons, never seriously duplicated in the United States, is educational opportunity. Remedial education for those who need it, school certificates and full academic degrees through the Open University system are commonplace accomplishments in the prisons. Prisons, in fact, are always universities, though up to this point the study had been largely of weapons use and insurgent warfare. Now the prisoners turned themselves, along with their formal studies, to the planning of a peace that would transform relations within Northern Ireland. Decisions for peace, of course, had to be made by the leadership of the various groups outside the prison, but the thinking was done in the jail through an assiduous process of planning. I had my own role in this. I had acted as mediator between the IRA and the government for a

brief period during the 1981 hunger strike, and I subsequently had many meetings with groups of prisoners of different parties in the H-Blocks. The men were increasingly convinced that there was no livable future for any of their communities unless they learned to accommodate each other.

Accommodation may seem a low level of reconciliation, but it proved the vital step. In my own conversations in the prison, my mantra was that the various parties needed to become the guarantors of one another's difference. Fierce resentments and calls for retribution infested both communities, but those known as "the men of violence" were learning better ways of living together.

#### POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Other events happened that contributed to the peace. The militant organizations all built their serious political wings. From the United States, University of Massachusetts Professor Padraig O'Malley was of great help to them in this, bringing their leadership over to the Amherst campus of UMass for conferences. In the '70s the UDA established its New Ulster Political Research Group-NUPRG—under the leadership of Glen Barr, with the full encouragement of their commander, Andy Tyrie. NUPRG set out to design a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and in fact for Britain as a whole (it has none) to guarantee equality of all citizens. Gusty Spence trained leaders of a new progressive sort in the prison, especially David Irvine and Billy Hutchinson. When released from prison, he built for the UVF a Progressive Unionist Party-PUP (no pun intended) which fully earned its name.

On the IRA side, Gerry Adams became head of the Sinn Féin Party. This party spearheaded the Irish independence movement and elected the first Dail government in 1918, leading to the creation of the Irish state. It then broke with its comrades and rejected the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. After the resulting civil war, Sinn Féin was reduced to the role of spokesman for the IRA military leadership, the Army Council, and was never allowed to say anything without Army Council permission. Adams, with the help of Martin McGuinness and others, engaged in a long process of persuasion within the Republican Movement to put before the Army Council the prospect of alternatives to the violent campaign. This political course was directed toward mutual understanding with the Protestant community and

the guarantee of Catholic rights while remaining true to the ultimate goal of Irish unity.

#### LEADERSHIP FROM CLERGY

Church was generally a disappointment both to Catholics and Protestants and did not draw convincingly on its heritage for ways of peace, but there were individuals who provided tremendously valuable help, most notably Redemptorist Father Alex Reid, who worked closely with Gerry Adams to construct the peace and Presbyterian Minister Roy Magee who helped the Loyalists. Magee describes how Gusty Spence, while still leader in the prison, would call his Protestant colleagues into his cell and ask them: "Why are you here?" If the answer was "I got caught," he would not be satisfied, but would require that the man reflect on what in his background and culture had led him to do the things he had done.

What spiritual reserves did they have to draw upon? Most of these prisoners of either side had become disillusioned with their church leadership. Yet deep within them remained convictions of the dignity of all human beings created in the likeness of God. In spite of all the trauma and revanchism within their communities it was to these reserves that they appealed. Often, released prisoners would describe how, when they went home to family and community, they would find that they were far advanced in these ways over those who had not shared the experiences of warfare and prison and had not reflected in these moral/spiritual ways.

#### ROLE OF THE U.S.

Irish Americans did their part as well. In one of the most extraordinary cultural transformations we have ever seen in this country, Irish Catholics, who had long been supporters of the United Ireland concept and regarded the Protestants of Ireland as foes, became the partisans of peace in Ireland. They had help in this from Niall O'Dowd, publisher of the New York weekly *Irish Voice*, William Flynn, business entrepreneur, and others who persuaded Bill Clinton to undertake some serious initiatives for Northern Ireland peace. The break came in February 1994 when against the advice of most of the American establishment, and to the horror of the British government, President Clinton granted Gerry Adams a 48-hour visa to attend a conference



of Northern Irish leaders organized by O'Dowd and Flynn in New York.

Adams talked continuously through those 48 hours with American leaders and on his return to Ireland persuaded the IRA's military leaders in the Army Council to declare a ceasefire in the conflict on August 31<sup>st</sup>. The Loyalist paramilitaries had to settle with irreconcilable feelings in their own community, but by mid-October, six weeks later, they had formed a new (Combined Loyalist Leadership Council (CLMC) to speak for both UDA and UVF. American Bill Flynn, now firm friend of Republican and Loyalist leadership alike, sat on the stage as Gusty Spence, for the CLMC, declared a Loyalist cease-fire.

## SETBACKS

The troubles were not over yet. The IRA cease-fire was broken in 1996 when the Army Council felt that the British government was deceiving them. They began a new bombing campaign which lasted through the summer of 1997. The Protestant cease-fire was contingent on the continuation of the IRA's, but when the IRA resumed bombing it was the prisoners, meeting in the jail with their party leadership, who insisted that the Loyalist cease-fire continue. Incredibly, they made this decision while two massive bombs went off within their hearing at the nearby British Army headquarters.

With continued help from President Clinton, who lent the Irish the brilliant assistance of Senator George Mitchell, the Northern Irish came to their Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Delays and interruptions followed in implementation of that agreement for the next nine years, occasioned because the supposedly "moderate" public had not gone through the process that the hard men had experienced in the prison. Many people who had never engaged directly in the violence, and who for that reason felt righteous, had to learn that the name of the game was now accommodation, and give up the idea of victory over a vanquished enemy. They resented the release of prisoners.

For the Republicans, the main action over these years was to recognize who carried authority within the movement. The Sinn Fein political figures, long the servants of the military leadership, were invited to the United States, feted at grand fund-raising dinners and welcomed at the White House. Army Council members had none of that. Initiatives began to come from the

Sinn Fein leadership. They sought consent from the Army Council and were deferential in their relation to them, but it became clear that they were in charge. Dissolution of the Army Council has long been awaited, perhaps delayed so long that it has now become irrelevant.

## CONCLUSION

The Northern Irish have their peace. Hard feelings still persist, but those who were the most intransigent leaders have now shown their capacity to work meaningfully and cordially together. The Christian heritage of Ireland has proven itself stronger than the accumulated hatred of many centuries, and murder is no longer the fashion. Concern for one another's good has become the goal even as religious practice fades.

As we celebrate these days the successes of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the close cooperation of the DUP's Ian Paisley and Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness, so much at ease with each other that they earn the soubriquet "Chuckle Brothers," and the smooth transition to a new administration that associates McGuinness with the formerly dour Peter Robinson, let's not forget the pioneer work done by the "hard men," so long dismissed as the "men of violence," who first constructed the possibilities of peace in prison.

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Garland, R. *Gusty Spence*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2001.

Moloney, E. *A Secret History of the IRA*. Hammonds worth: Allan Lane Publishers, 2002. This is the best record of the work of Fr. Alex Reid.



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# THE PARDONER'S TALE

James Torrens, S.J.

## YOUR CONFESSOR SAYS

I breathe deeply entering the box,  
How I hate the screen between us.

I have to strain to hear  
what so many voices drop.

When there's a call to go deep,  
we have just three minutes.

What do I tell the spouses  
more sinned against than sinning?

How I'd like some tender words  
for young punchers and imps.

I just shake my head sometimes,  
wondering what in the world.

But here's the real confession:  
I am buoyed by the spectacle—

grace reaching into the brambles,  
the soul and its angel wrestling.

the brush with pure innocence  
and palpable friends of God.

Words not to be said lightly  
that cost a sweat of blood.

Oh, and it's not me forgiving,  
not to forget that.

To talk about forgiveness is to delve deep into the human spirit. How difficult, painful and costly it is to forgive. When it comes to resentment, grudges and simmering anger, we are much beyond appetite, self-indulgence, ordinary compulsion. This is about the ego and its enduring bruises. This is about the souring of the soul.

How many families of victims are thoroughly infected by some hurt formerly endured by one of their own. "Don't talk to us about listening to reason. Blood for blood." That is the reasoning of the natural instincts. That is what lies behind the Hatfields and the McCoys, the Montagues and the Capulets, the code of the gangs, the fiery imperative of vendetta.

Folk wisdom says that time heals all wounds. It ain't necessarily so. Something that happened to us, that was done to us, eons ago can pop up again as vividly as if it occurred just now. Grievances lurk in our brain as sore spots. Ask someone once mistreated by a parent, falsely accused of cheating, or jilted by a sweetheart. Some people get over it, but plenty don't. Mostly, as offended parties, we have to work at forgiving. Time needs a lot of help.

As offenders, those who have wronged others, the big first step to take is towards being right with God, who has each of our brothers and sisters very much at heart. We need the salve of the Holy Spirit, the infusion of the spirit of Jesus. In the formula for absolution of penitents, we hear that "God, the Father of mercies, sent the Holy Spirit upon us for the forgiveness of sins." It is the Spirit of Jesus that acts, through the ministry of the Church, for the reconciliation of sinners. In the sacrament, Jesus Christ lives up to his own urging to forgive seventy times seven times.

As a minister of the Church my frequent role is the channeling of God's forgiveness. The circum-



stances are often far from optimum, for in the confessional people tend to practically whisper, and there is sometimes the pressure of time created by waiting lines (as at a communal penance service), and the narratives tend to complication. For some people, frequency of the sacrament feeds their neurosis. Nonetheless the confessor has to be in awe continually at the essential goodness of people, struggling to conform to "the law of Christ." This goodness, or this effort at goodness, displays itself above all in the struggle to forgive others. How desperately this exertion needs the grace of Jesus Christ.

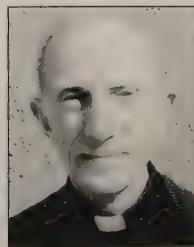
It is not just in confession that people seek the Lord's help. Many years ago, when I was teaching in one of the traditionally Black colleges, a student who knew I was a priest came to my apartment to unburden himself. He and two other students had rented a lodging, and the others lied to him about how much the landlord was asking. They pocketed the difference and, in fact, were cheating him out of fifty dollars a month. He found out and was, of course, furious. He had elaborate plans to get even with them, which he shared in detail. Why had he come to see me? Because his anger and his conscience needed some resolution. He wanted help—God's help, I believe—in abandoning his drastic scheme. Did he do so? I don't know, but I very much think so.

Saint Francis of Assisi, in his "Canticle of the Sun," has a wonderful exclamation: "Blessed be my Lord for all those who pardon one another for love's sake." Forgiveness is a work of love. Only the love of God, explicit or implicit (people do not always recognize grace working within them), can carry us to this action. We pledge ourselves in the "Our Father" to act according to the model of God's abundant forgiveness. But we need to attend to what we are saying, to unclench the fist with its jealously nursed resentments—and to do so before we die and go to meet the loving Savior.

In the sacrament that we call "reconciliation," we are called back into the good graces, the inner counsels, of God. That is no small moment in a life. It is like the prodigal in the parable being reconciled to the father who is watching anxiously for just that moment. Much art, patience, desire is necessary for human reconciliations. For the offender, the heart and the conscience can be profoundly uneasy until the healing happens—and ecstatic once it does.

After the bombing of the World Trade Center, Pope John Paul II, in his message for the World Day of Peace, focused upon forgiveness, a spirit of forgiveness, as essential to end the spiral of retaliations. In this message, he does not by any means put justice on the back burner, for repair of injuries is often still mandatory. However, he insists that the well-being of society, of the world, depends on forgiveness.

I would reaffirm that forgiveness inhabits people's hearts before it becomes a social reality. Only to the degree that an ethics and a culture of forgiveness prevail can we hope for a "politics" of forgiveness, expressed in society's attitudes and laws, so that through them justice takes on a more human character. Forgiveness is above all a personal choice, a decision of the heart to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil. The measure of such a decision is the love of God, who draws us to himself in spite of our sin.



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# A DIFFICULT FUTURE FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

A Case Study from Peru

Matt Garr, S.J.



Many Truth and Reconciliation Commissions fail in their mission. While they normally are successful in uncovering the truth about what happened during the years of political violence, more often than not their proposals for structural change in society, so that the same situation will never again be repeated, are met with indifference at best and often with strong opposition.

This is not due to the lack of dedication or effort on the part of its members, but simply because those structural obstacles are too many and too strong. A few, of course, have been successful. South Africa, for example, was successful because the whole structure of governance changed and because of the exceptional quality of its leaders. It succeeded in Chile because the Truth Commission limited the scope of its investigation to a couple of specific areas. Perhaps Argentina or even more recently Spain will have more of an opportunity for success since their governments waited for a generation before taking up the issue of its predecessors.

Nevertheless, affirming that most commissions fail in their attempts to overcome the impunity of the perpetrators of violence and obtain reparations for the victims does not mean that these efforts are a waste of time. Indeed, it can be argued that if the effort to uncover the truth of what happened during the years of violence is not done relatively soon after the events being investigated, then most of the important evidence is lost since fewer first hand witnesses can be found.

The important question to ask is what is to be done between the original limited success of these commissions and the later “re-awakening” of future generations. My purpose in writing this article is to examine one specific case, that of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (*Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación*, from here on “CVR”), in order to arrive at some



suggestions about future ways of proceeding. I have been working in Peru since 1975 and lived for more than a decade in a rural area of Peru that was very seriously affected by the political violence of the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I cooperated as a volunteer with the Peruvian CVR between 2001 and 2003, and I work for the Peruvian Catholic Bishops' Social Action (Justice and Peace) Commission (*Comisión Episcopal de Acción Social*, from here on "CEAS"), one of whose goals is to support the follow-up efforts of the CVR. While I will be citing official reports, most of the material in this article is based on my own experience.

I will first give a brief description of the effects of the political violence between 1980 and 2000. This is based on the overall findings of the CVR. But I will also describe concretely how the people in the rural area where I worked responded to the efforts of the CVR—the difficulties they experienced and one limited example of success. This concrete example will be used to point out some of the inherent difficulties involved in such efforts to discover the truth and work for justice for the victims of the violence. But I also hope to show what might be possible leads for a long-term reconciliation.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN PERU: 1980-2000

In Peru the political violence extended from May 1980 when the Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*) faction of the Peruvian Communist Party began their armed revolution with the burning of ballot boxes during a presidential election in the south central area of the Andes known as Ayacucho. It extended until November 2000 when the autocratic government of Alberto Fujimori ended with his escape from Peru.

After the fall of the Fujimori regime, the transitional government established the CVR in June 2001 to investigate the causes and effects of these years of political violence and to make recommendations for the future. The twelve commissioners were given a two year mandate to present their conclusions. Those voluminous conclusions can be found on the internet in both Spanish and English. (See the suggested readings at the end of the article.)

The principal and surprising conclusion of the CVR concerned the number of people killed. Human rights organizations had calculated that the total number of dead and disappeared during the 20 years of violence was approximately 35,000 people. The CVR, by

If a human group is reduced to basic survival in a situation of conflict, it becomes increasingly difficult for its members to maintain a sense of the innate dignity of every human being.

doing a statistical projection of the number of deaths that were reported, demonstrated that the actual number was nearly twice the estimated amount (69,280).

During the first two years of the conflict, the central government tried to ignore what was going on. It was only in early 1983 that the region was placed under martial law and the army was sent in to restore order. But the strategy of the armed forces for the first eight years of the conflict only worsened the situation. The army philosophy of containment consisted in trying to make the people more afraid (and "respectful") of them than they were of the Shining Path. Nevertheless, I want to make it perfectly clear that the Shining Path was a terrorist organization. It never attempted to dialogue with the people. While the organization was entirely homegrown, its strategy was to impose its views through physical violence. The victims of the violence, the great majority of whom were from the rural, Quechua-speaking areas of the Andes, found themselves caught between two extremes.

#### EFFECTS OF EXTREME VIOLENCE ON COMMUNITIES

If a human group is reduced to basic survival in a situation of conflict, it becomes increasingly difficult for its members to maintain a sense of the innate dignity of every human being. In poor societies, like the peasant culture of the mountains of Peru, even in the best of cases physical survival is not a given. People need to adapt in order to live. Peasants make choices according to the image of the limited good. When the social situation is complicated by political terrorism and government repression, as in Peru, such strategies are stretched to the breaking point.

In the first place, normal patterns of trust and identity break down. If I know that my neighbor's brother is a soldier in the army or my cousin's husband is a teacher in a school controlled by the Shining Path, how can I trust them? Traditionally when passing other people on the street, everyone greets everyone else by

In some sense everyone in the community was responsible for some of the things that had happened at least some of the time.

name. But once the problem of political terrorism begins, the rural countryside becomes like any large, anonymous city: No one greets anyone else.

Secondly, memories are long, and even when the external manifestations of violence have ended, people remember who was responsible for the deaths of their family members. Once the violence is over and the displaced persons begin to return, the community needs to develop some sense of order, once again, for the sake of survival. Peasant communities survive on the principle of community labor. Instead of paying taxes so other people will perform basic services, each family is required to participate for a certain number of days per year in community work projects. Without these structures the community would break down and the families themselves could no longer exist. The practical solution is a “pact of silence.” People go back to “business as usual” when, in fact, nothing is as it was before. The resentments may be buried, but they are still there.

#### A CONCRETE EXAMPLE IN THE CENTRAL ANDES

The area in which I worked experienced the worst forms of violence from 1988 through 1992. The Shining Path occupied the zone until the beginning of 1991, when the army took over the area. When the worst of the active violence had ended, the pastoral teams living in the area could begin to work on the issue of reconciliation with the people. Some materials and reflections on the theme of reconciliation had begun to appear, such as those of Robert Schreiter, and these provided our teams with a framework which helped to put a name on our own process. The loss of security, identity, and dignity in the midst of living the terrorist and government “false narratives” must be followed by a much longer process of rebuilding those values.

The pastoral teams worked extensively with two contemporary models for reconciliation: one is the method of “peace builders” developed by the

Mennonite theologian, John Paul Lederach, continued through the international Caritas network and sponsored by Catholic Relief Services. The other is a program developed by the Consolata Fathers in Colombia and now present in several Latin American countries. It is called ESPERE (the Spanish word for the imperative verb “hope!” which is an acronym for *EScuelas de PERdón y REconciliación* – Schools for Forgiveness and Reconciliation). While both are excellent programs, they are based on the willingness and ability of the participants to share their own feelings with others. In CEAS we have had some success in working with groups of women who were seriously affected by the political violence and who have been living in the city of Lima for at least twenty years. But these techniques do not seem to work so well with peasants whose culture is still non-urban and non-western.

Another important tool for reconciliation was initiated by the CVR itself in 2002: arranging *public audiences* in which victims could tell their own stories to the public. While the experience in Peru was different than in South Africa (its purpose was only to provide a dramatic means so that the public in general could be aware of what had happened, and no amnesty was offered to perpetrators), nevertheless Peru is the only country in Latin America which held such public audiences.

Because I worked in a rural parish and had maintained my contact with the people there, and because CEAS was cooperating with the CVR, I decided to try to convince the people in that town to participate in this activity—not only as a way of letting their story be known, but also as a means to bring to some sort of closure to what had happened there during the worst years of violence.

I quickly discovered that I was up against a brick wall. An interview with one man, who occupied a political position within the community in 2001, was typical: “Are you going to pay for another lawyer for me?” He asked this because in some sense everyone in the community was responsible for some of the things that had happened at least some of the time. Not everyone was equally guilty. Certainly most of the people had not participated in activities where other people were killed. But everyone had been affected by the fear, and afterwards many people felt guilty that they had not tried to do more.

Nevertheless, over the next several months I continued to return to the town to try to find some volunteers. I talked to about ten persons who were relatives



of people who had been killed. Several of them had already been interviewed privately by the CVR workers, but either out of fear or shame or concern about the consequences, few were willing to go beyond that. Finally I found one young woman (B.Q.) who was willing to give her testimony in public. Here is what B.Q. reported.

On November 2, 1989 a combined police and military squad, who were not in uniform, arrived in the town and demanded that the whole population meet in the central plaza. The people were forced to lie down on the street, the men on one side and the women on the other. Then the soldiers took five men and one woman suspected of collaborating with the terrorists into a house on the side of the plaza and shot each of them with a pistol. When the paramilitary force left the plaza in their truck, they announced that no one was to move from their places for an hour. But a few minutes later B.Q. was the first one to get up and go into the house and discover the dead bodies. One of them was her father. Her screams brought the rest of the community.

By 2002, twelve and a half years later, she was married with two children. She was only fifteen years old when the murders occurred. While no one else from the town was willing to give his or her public testimony, many people were willing to accompany B.Q. and support her in her testimony. We hired two minivans to take approximately twenty-five people to the hearing. The public hearing was held in a theatre which belonged to the Archdiocese. More than five hundred people attended, and the hearings went on for two days. The proceedings were also filmed, and two national television channels and all of the local radio, television, and press were present. Eight of the twelve CVR commissioners were present on the stage, and B.Q. was seated on one side, accompanied by family members, the CVR therapists, and myself.

B.Q. spoke for twenty-five minutes and only broke down when she described finding her father's body piled up with the other persons who were assassinated. Her younger sister sat behind us and had tears streaming down her face during the whole presentation. B.Q. remembered the events well enough to describe verbatim the gross vocabulary of the soldiers.

When we left the stage, we went out the back way and met with the others from her home town. Everyone embraced B.Q.; many tears were shed; but there was also a tremendous sense of relief. I asked the group if

they wanted to remain for a while longer to hear some of the other testimonies, but the general sense was that, while the public audience was important, the experience had been draining enough that everyone wanted to return home.

I think that the most significant thing of all happened when we returned to the village. We agreed that we would meet the following morning at church to celebrate the liturgy in memory of all of the people who had died during the violence in their town. Of course there were tears again when each family said the names of their murdered family members. After the Mass we left the church in procession to visit the places where some of the people had died. I know what my own feelings were; from looking at the faces of the people around me and talking it over later with the Dominican sisters who lived in the town, I believe that for the first time in thirteen years we actually experienced a sense of joy and of peace. That was not necessarily the end of all of the problems of the effects of the violence, but it was a significant milestone, at least for the participants, in the process of reconciliation.

#### CAN ANYTHING MORE BE ACCOMPLISHED?

When the CVR made its findings public at the end of August 2003, there was a concerted effort on the part of its members, the Peruvian Ombudsman's office, the community of human rights organizations, and many local church groups, both Catholic and Evangelical Protestant, to spread the news. So a significant part of the population at least expressed general interest in working towards that national reconciliation which was the CVR's objective. But there were two big difficulties:

First of all, not everyone was interested in the conclusions. Another large sector of the population was against the work of the CVR.

Secondly, how do we go about interpreting in concrete form the CVR's most long-range goal of *closing the huge social, economic, cultural, racial, and gender gaps which have shown just how far Peru has distanced itself from justice and solidarity*, to quote the final recommendation of the CVR?

The first difficulty points up what I said at the beginning of this article about why many truth commissions are unsuccessful in carrying out their recommendations. In Peru, analogous to Guatemala or El

In Peru, analogous to Guatemala or El Salvador, the government to whom the truth commissions handed over their conclusions was still controlled by the very people whom those commissions critiqued.

Salvador, the government to whom the truth commissions handed over their conclusions was still controlled by the very people whom those commissions critiqued. While the Peruvian government had changed in 2001, the generals and admirals of the armed forces at that time had been the junior officers during the times of the heaviest violence, and they were not about to accept any conclusions which questioned their actions.

Perhaps more could have been done if civil society itself had continued to express interest. Certainly the churches made an effort to keep the issue alive, and church and civil human rights organizations formed a collective called *Para que no se repita* ("So that it won't be repeated") which organized activities on each of the four anniversaries of the date on which the CVR's final report was made public. One of the organizations most involved in developing the *Para que no se repita* coalition was the Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas, founded by Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez. Thousands of people participated in these activities. The downside of these successful memorial ceremonies is that nine out of every ten participants belonged to specific church organizations. These organizations represent only a small minority of the whole population. And in fact, the churches themselves are divided with respect to the conclusions of the CVR.

The truth of the matter is that very few sectors of Peruvian society are interested in keeping the theme of reconciliation within the public spotlight:

- The armed forces and police are not interested because they believe that they did their duty and that it is unjust to accuse them of exceeding their authority.
- The political parties which controlled the country between 1980 and 2000 stand accused by the CVR of washing their hands of the human rights issues.
- Many of the victims of the violence themselves are not enthusiastic about maintaining the spotlight on what happened to them, either because they recog-

nize their own level of participation or out of fear that remnants of the Shining Path or the police themselves could seek revenge for their testimony.

- Finally, the public in general, especially in the cities, has lost interest. The people the CVR most wants to help, the *excluded* in the rural outlying regions of the country, are still excluded.

Nevertheless, thanks to the efforts of human right organizations in the Catholic and Evangelical churches and through civil society, efforts are still being made to accomplish some of the goals proposed by the CVR.

Some work is being done through the Inter-American Human Rights Commission in Washington and the Inter-American Human Rights Court in Costa Rica to proceed with the prosecution of a few symbolic cases where government forces were involved in grave human rights abuses.

The current government has set up a very limited project to aid some 440 peasant communities in areas that were affected by the violence, although the number of towns affected is in the thousands.

Some monuments have been set up to commemorate the victims of the violence, especially a major monument in the central park in Lima, though the opposition unreasonably claims that only the truly innocent should be remembered. As I have pointed out above, except for the most egregious cases, it is almost impossible to distinguish clearly between the innocent and the guilty.

In a recent study prepared by Sofía Macher of the *Instituto de Defensa Legal*, one of the original twelve commissioners, of the CVR's 85 recommendations concerning institutional reform and reparations for the victims, fully 60% of the recommendations are still basically unfulfilled.

At the fourth annual commemoration of the CVR's final report last year Dr. Salomón Lerner, president of the CVR, called upon civil society to continue the struggle to work for a model of reconciliation in order to build a better Peru for tomorrow, that is, to work for the reform of government and social institutions in order to overcome the poverty and the exclusion that were the deepest causes of the political violence in the first place. Certainly the primary task for those persons who hold that belief is to continue to insist, opportunely or inopportunely, that the issue of political violence must not be forgotten and that national reconciliation does not have to be a utopian dream.

But what about the victims of the violence them-



elves and their families? The programs to obtain legal justice against the perpetrators and the projects to offer community reparations are symbolic at best. Most of the peasant families who suffered from terrorism and government repression will receive no compensation at all. Most of them have internally accepted a very truncated sort of reconciliation in which people make the choice of keeping quiet about past abuses in order to get on with the business of survival.

Nevertheless, the people do remember what happened and who was responsible, and since they have no outlet for expressing their anger and grief, these feelings fester. Extremist groups could take advantage of this situation, and the violence could begin all over again.

I described how a group of victims of political violence were able to benefit from a reconciliation liturgy which we celebrated in June 2002 after one woman from that town presented her testimony at a public audience. I do not believe that we can simply go back to the community and suggest that we perform many such rituals. But where pastoral teams are present in these areas on a permanent basis, these pastoral agents can be trained and ready to listen when and if the victims themselves are willing to share their stories. In that way pastoral agents can accompany the victims in the long process that leads to a fuller sense of personal forgiveness and community reconciliation. Such efforts require a permanent presence, but that is precisely what the Christian churches have to offer that government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) often cannot: to remain with the people over the long haul and be attentive to their stories.

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# A Kirundi Hymn

Margaret Cessna, H.M.

I heard the warmest of sounds and the sweetest of all Christmas offerings. The melody told me that it was “O Come All Ye Faithful,” but I did not understand a word of his native Kirundi language. This eighteen-year-old refugee man/child was sitting next to me as I drove him home from the Catholic Charities Christmas party for refugee families. Once in the car, he began to sing, and I could have driven for miles in order to hear his gift to me. The drive did not last forever. Only the five minutes it took for me to get him and his two little sisters home from the party. Only the length of one glorious hymn.

None of them spoke or understood a word of English. But on this night, we all understood the universal language of music. And dance. At their request, the families had danced for us to end the evening festivities.

I had gone to a meeting six weeks before, to learn about the refugee families coming into our city and the need for mentors to help them through the initial weeks of mystery and uncertainty as they settled into their new homes. They had left terror behind when they fled their country of Burundi for the refugee camp in Congo.

I volunteered to be a family mentor. The family that I was to work with was Hutu; they had escaped the oppression of the Tutsi gangs in their homeland. The next week, I paid them a visit with two other mentors and an interpreter. Grandmother, mother, father, and five children had recently been settled into a modest duplex in a poor area near my city.

They were gracious and welcoming people as we sat in their simple new home and learned about them, and them about us, while a fellow countryman of theirs interpreted our conversation. But we did not need an interpreter to understand their happiness in being free and safe.

Burundi is one of the world’s poorest nations and has been plagued by civil war and tension between the Tutsi minority and the Hutu majority for many years. This family did not need to worry about that ever again.

Just before we left, the interpreter asked the dad what he needed. We were told that he said boots for his children. I sent an email to twenty generous friends when I got home that evening and in one week I had enough money to get boots and gloves for the parents, the grandmother, and all five children, with some money left over for the next need. Catholic Charities had provided winter coats, and another donor had given hats and scarves for this family who had never been cold or seen snow.

This Burundi family reminded me of another family who had traveled far on the first Christmas. There was no bright star in the sky the night we visited our new friends. No angels singing. No shepherds or royalty. But the simplicity was the same. The poverty was similar. And the generosity of twenty people was as valuable to them, I believe, as gold, frankincense, or myrrh.

I dropped the children off after the Christmas party and hummed “O Come All Ye Faithful” all the way home. No words. Just humming. I did not want to spoil the memory or the experience with English words. Next year, I resolve to sing along in Kirundi.



Sister Margaret Cessna, H.M., a sister of the Humility of Mary, is a writer from Cleveland, Ohio.



# Prospects of Reconciliation

## The Case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Johan Katunga Murhula

### I INTRODUCTION

The exploration of reconciliation as a concept has gained momentum with the booming interest in alternative dispute resolution and peace building since the collapse of communism and the official end of the cold war in the 1990s. This has prompted the reorientation of energies from the arms race to less bellicose alternatives in state relations, especially between the superpowers. This period also coincided with the development of what I term “ideologies of peace” to fill the vacuum of the dichotomist “capitalist-communist” ideologies. All these changes are embedded in an environment characterized by the progress of communication and an amplified access to information that has brought the world even closer. In the meantime, scholars have started deepening their understanding of reconciliation and qualitative relationships. The net result is the slow but sure development of a global consciousness that there are approaches to conflict resolution that are mindful of people’s relationships in a globalized world. More and more peace advocates are formed as agents of this transformation in many universities in the world. There are now more peace workers than there were twenty years back. Embedded in the idea of peace is the concept of reconciliation.

At a conceptual level, an increasing number of scholars are looking at the concept of reconciliation as the key dynamic to living successfully in the multicultural and interfaith reality of our contemporary world. Indeed, reconciliation contains two apparently irreconcilable realities: a spiritual reality and a secular reality. Johan Galtung symbolically qualifies them as “the priest and the judge” in his twelve stage approach to reaching reconciliation. In their search for reconciliation, many faith-based methods have focused on reconciliation as a divine endeavor linked to a human spiritual dimension. We need to reconcile simply because this is what God demands that we do.



Others have overlooked the spiritual dimension of reconciliation and have focused on “tangibles,” “measurables,” and the objective side of people’s relationships. The reference point shifts from God to state and more specifically to the judiciary system, international laws or any politically accepted arrangements. In this reflection, I will explore a few of these theories of reconciliation and see how they apply to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

## II. SOME CURRENT THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS AND PARADIGMS

I will first look at Professor Hizkias Assefa’s framework on conflict handling mechanisms. He explores the degree of mutual participation by the conflicting parties in the search for solutions to the problems underlying their conflict. The framework is an interesting tool that places reconciliation at the highest level of aspiration in a continuum of conflict settlement approaches from the use of force through adjudication, arbitration, negotiation, mediation and reconciliation. He illustrates how the widespread use of force continues to prevail. Using Assefa’s model I will explore the use of force to amplify the need for reconciliation.

Assefa shows how futile the use of force is as a tool that can assure a lasting settlement of a conflict. Force tends to suppress the visible manifestation of a conflict and leave the underlying issues, often embedded in people’s relationships, un-addressed. The use of violence as a way of addressing a conflict suffocates present and future parties’ relationships. Failing adequately to resolve a conflict, the use of force gives an illusion of a solution and postpones a satisfactory resolution of the issues to be addressed. Most of the time people hesitate or better still avoid facing the problem and prefer to “get rid of it” as soon as possible. Their fear of facing the pain of entering into dialogue and facing the other pushes them to find short cuts and resort to violent means. The use of violence postpones the real solution to the future. The postponement of a durable solution risks serious and increasingly complex consequences including:

1. The risk of issue proliferation, with the parties having to deal with several issues born from the original issue and,
2. The risk of dealing in the future with magnified issues, with the parties having to

deal with issues that are disproportional to their handling capacity.

In a way, it is because of the oppressive (violent) nature of some structures in the state and family, structures that do not accommodate dialogue between the different members (employers and employees, parents and children, wife and husband, citizens and leaders), that, in the long run, the society has to deal with rebellions, low productivity, delinquency, divorce, street children and prostitution. For example, some put the policies of exclusion and oppression of one community at the core of the genocide in Rwanda. In the short-term the oppression gives the illusion of stability and enjoyment of undue privileges to the rulers of the day. In the long run it may prepare the ground for violent uprising of unimaginable proportions. A durable solution is only reached when the parties concerned have sincerely and truly participated in the efforts of finding an agreeable solution.

In his spectrum Assefa puts reconciliation at the opposite pole from the use of force. He understands reconciliation not only as an aspiration, a vision, but also as a mechanism for the prevention of violent conflict and for social transformation. He defines it as a proactive approach to conflict in the sense that reconciliation is a process that allows a thorough investigation of underlying issues that have created the conflict situation and helps the parties consensually to find acceptable ways of tackling them. This in return lays the foundation for positively approaching future conflicts and hence has the potential to prevent conflict. In brief, reconciliation is a mechanism that assures high participation of the parties in their search for a solution while permitting the prevention of future violent conflicts.

Assefa identifies four dimensions to focus on in order to achieve reconciliation. Since reconciliation is a process of reestablishing broken relationships, the critical question is “with whom do we reconcile?” He suggests that reconciliation should happen with God, with self, with the neighbor and with nature. Recognition of one’s “sin,” including expressing regret, confessing it, repenting and sincerely asking for forgiveness (including commitment not to sin again), assures reconciliation with God. Making peace with God will then spill over to the self with the feeling of inner peace and the joy of being forgiven. But reconciliation in this case will not be complete until it is



## Reconciliation is a meeting place, a social place, where truth, mercy, justice and peace come together.

expanded to the neighbor, the one who directly experienced the effects of the sinful act. This suggests, where possible, a process of reparation or restitution that shows, in concrete terms, the commitment to redress the past offensive acts. The wholeness of reconciliation will finally be achieved if there is good care of God's creation, the shared patrimony, and its physical space.

There are at least two important limitations of Assefa's model. The first limitation is the Christian-based nature of the paradigm. Although the implications of Assefa's model touch on secular bodies like governance, reconciliation politics, statehood, economic growth and justice, it remains a "theological notion of reconciliation" with a heavy Christian connotation. The process described in this model and the references that support it are extracted from the Bible and Christian teachings. Religious beliefs are such an important factor in human relationships that sometimes they determine how people relate to one another. If the model seems to be heavily leaning to Christianity, those without these strong beliefs may feel excluded.

The second limitation is a consequence of the first. The model seems to address more inter-personal conflicts than large-scale violent conflicts. It is easier to talk to God as an individual taking personal responsibility for the sin committed and seeking for forgiveness. It is equally easy to feel the inner peace of being forgiven and reconciled with God, and it is voluntary to decide to re-establish the broken relationship with neighbor and nature. The sinner needs to be a Christian and not only a Christian but a mature, faithful one, to undergo this process wholeheartedly. It would be very complex to accommodate individual transformation within a heterogeneous collective like a nation. When reconciliation is needed at a national level, as in the case of the DRC, it is not clear what processes or concrete steps need to be followed in order to arrive at reconciliation. The challenge is to be innovative enough to customize this model to accom-

modate the complex multicultural and multi-faith nature of the Congolese society.

Another author who has explored the need for reconciliation is Professor John Paul Lederach. In view of the failure of contemporary methods of conflict "resolution" to offer durable peace settlements, Lederach suggests reconciliation as "meeting point between realism and innovation." Lederach indicates that the traditional ways, the "real politik" of dealing with violent conflicts, have shown their limitations; hence there is a great need for innovatively integrating other means of accommodating people's relationships beyond ruthless aggregation of self-centered interests. Lederach bases his understanding of reconciliation on three working assumptions.

1. Relationships are the *Alpha* and *Omega* of "conflict and its long-term solution."
2. Reconciliation is an encounter, a space for acknowledgement of the past painful experience and validation of each other's experiences, as well as imagining together a common future.
3. Reconciliation needs innovation. It invites the parties to think outside the "box."

From a theological perspective Lederach explains how, through his experience of working with conflict in Nicaragua, he came up with an understanding of reconciliation drawn from Psalm 85:10: "Truth and mercy have met together; Peace and justice have kissed." He concludes that reconciliation is a meeting place, a social place, where truth, mercy, justice and peace come together. The presence of these four concepts (what I would call four *pillars* of reconciliation) becomes an indicator of a reconciled space. It is a place where acknowledgement, transparency, revelation, and clarity are witnessed; where acceptance, forgiveness, support, compassion, and healing are practiced; where equality, right relationships, reparation, restitution and equity are witnessed; and where harmony, unity, well-being, security and respect for all prevail. Reconciliation, therefore, becomes a focus—a vision to achieve, and a locus—a space for encounters where relationships are re-made.

Both Lederach and Assefa advocate for reconciliation not only as a vision but also as a method, an

approach for social transformation and violent conflict prevention. Both found their theoretical framework in Christian theology with application in the secular contemporary world.

Danish scholar Anna Bay Paludan uses the same four “pillars” of reconciliation identified by Lederach (truth-mercy-justice-peace) to come up with a framework she calls the *Shalom paradigm* or the *vision of Shalom*. She attempts to draw a link between the shalom “image” and practical reality. She does this by illustrating the understanding of each *pillar* with examples drawn from reconciliation efforts in Africa. The *Shalom Paradigm* is inspired by Isaiah 11:6-9. She translates the four pillars of reconciliation into what she terms “action-language.” Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace are respectively matched with Education, Healing, Human Rights and Development.

#### LIMITATIONS OF PALUDAN AND LEDERACH’S MODELS

The two models are inspired by Christian theology, which might limit their scope in reaching out to other faiths in the process of rebuilding relationships across cultures and religions. Lederach blames politicians and “humanitarians alike” for turning toward religious, philosophical, and biblical concepts and trying to make these concepts work at a social and political level. I think theological concepts suffer from the same dilemma when they address non faith-based social and political matters. On one hand, the “priest” has a methodology and the power to name the concepts but lacks the means and language to reach out to non-members of the congregation. On the other hand, the “judge” has the power and the mandate to reach out to a larger constituency but lacks the concepts and know-how for articulating the projects of reconciliation to those in the conflict.

#### PARTIAL CONCLUSION

The models proposed by the three authors are extremely useful in helping to understand reconciliation and giving contemporary practices. They help to measure the gaps in current social reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation. They also bring to light the tremendous efforts that need to be invested to improve people’s relationships as a way of healing the painful memories of the past and visioning a healthy common future. They set the stage for people of good

will to start working on alternatives to prevailing crude, interest-based methods of addressing human conflicts. The models are powerful awareness tools for alternative dispute resolution and social transformation.

The dependency of these models on the Bible and theology may reflect the difficulty of operationalizing the concept of reconciliation in a secularized world and hence the challenge to come up with proven step-by-step methods that may lead to reconciliation. The “how” of the models is Christian-centered and could easily be applied to genuine faithful Christians. How about the secular world and nations like the DRC that are in dire need of peace and reconciliation? Could it be that such methods are unrealistic and that one needs to conclude with Galtung: “nobody really knows how to successfully achieve it [reconciliation]?”

#### III. DRC: THE QUEST FOR RECONCILIATION

I found it useful to look at Lederach’s “four pillars” to see how they might apply to the Congolese search for peace and reconciliation. I will also refer to some of Galtung’s twelve approaches to reconciliation, some of which I consider an attempt to respond to the question of “how” we achieve reconciliation in a secular world. In brief, I will refer to the four pillars of reconciliation to describe the limitations of the current peace and reconciliation efforts and will resort to some of Galtung’s twelve approaches to prescribe suggestions for peace and reconciliation in the DRC.

#### BACKGROUND

The DRC is located in the heart of Africa, the third largest country on the continent after Sudan and Algeria, and shares borders with nine countries: Congo-Brazzaville in the west, Central Africa Republic and Sudan in the north, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania in the east and Zambia and Angola in the south. Because of its strategic position DRC belongs to more than one sub-region on the continent. An unevenly distributed sixty million Congolese inhabit the country. DRC is endowed with a large variety of abundant minerals including diamonds, gold, cobalt, uranium, manganese and coltan (columbite-tantalite) along with other natural resources such as oil, timber and water. DRC is among the five top producer-exporters of a number of strategic minerals in the world.



Congo got its independence on June 30, 1960. Kasavubu was the president and Patrice Lumumba the prime minister and head of the first government. He was brutally murdered under obscure circumstances with western (Belgium and USA) powers being accused of his murder. Following his assassination, the country plunged into an era of bloody rebellion, known as the Mulelist rebellion referring to its leader Mulele, a follower of Lumumba. The chaos lasted until 1964 when the rebellion was officially quelled and the first successful legislative elections were organized. As people were preparing for the presidential elections, Mobutu Sese Seko took power in a military coup and ruthlessly ruled the country for 32 years.

In 1996 a rebellion started in the Kivu provinces in the eastern part of the country. Laurent Desire Kabila, who led the rebellion, got open military, diplomatic, and political support from Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. Eventually Mobutu was overthrown and on May 17, 1997 Kabila proclaimed himself president. He soon parted ways with his former allies Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi whom he accused of wanting to assassinate him. On August 2, 1998 these former allies started waging war against him and nearly captured the capital Kinshasa. Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Chad came to Kabila's rescue, and a stalemate occurred on the battlefield. In the meantime, Rwanda and Uganda hurriedly organized some Congolese who were disgruntled with Kabila's style of leadership into rebel movements: the Rwandan-supported Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) and the Ugandan-supported Movement Liberation of Congo (MLC-Bemba). The RCD waged war from the eastern front toward the rich diamond province of Kasai in the center of the country, and the MLC attacked the Kinshasa government from the north and northeast. By the end of 1999 more than half of the country was under so-called rebels. The RCD has undergone a process of fragmentation into several RCDs with different external backers. As part of the international peace efforts, a peace accord was signed on July 10, 1999 between representatives of the rebel movements and the government of Kinshasa. On January 16, 2001 Laurent Desire Kabila was assassinated under mysterious circumstances, and his son Joseph Kabila replaced him. Elections were eventually organized in 2006 and Kabila was elected president.

In the meantime the cost to civilians has been unimaginable. An estimated 4 million Congolese have died since 1998 due to the war and its related

An estimated 4 million Congolese have died since 1998 due to the war and its related conditions.

conditions. Rape has been systematically used as a weapon of war. The destruction of the environment by those in pursuit of strategic minerals, timber, and rare species, especially in the eastern side the country, has been so terrible that some are now talking about ecocide. In the eastern part of the country, in the world patrimony of national parks, reserves and game parks, the animal population has been decimated. The infrastructure of the country has been nearly completely destroyed.

#### THE NATURE OF THE CONGOLESE CRISIS: THE CAUSES AND THE PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT

The Congolese crisis traces its causes to a combination of internal and external factors that are strongly linked to the traumatic history of the Congolese people. Historically DRC has known the following 10 traumatic epochs:

1. From the 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century the period of slave trade.
2. From the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century DRC, then L'Etat Indépendant du Congo (Independent State of Congo), was the private property of King Leopold II of Belgium.
3. From 1908 to 1960 Congo was a colony of Belgium after the King sold his property to his country.
4. On January 17, 1961 Lumumba was assassinated.
5. From 1960 to 1964 chaos reigned, characterized by secessionist tendencies, especially in Katanga and Kasai, and the Mulelist rebellion trying to avenge the assassination of Lumumba.
6. From 1964 to 1965 the rebellion was quelled with international support and successful legislative elections were organized and democracy started emerging.

## How does somebody engage in forgiveness when the offender looks so illusive, faceless and somehow unknown?

7. On November 24, 1965 a military coup led by Mobutu Sese Seko suddenly terminated the democratic process and inaugurated the era of one of the worst dictatorships on the African continent.
8. In 1997 Laurent Desire Kabila ousted Mobutu proclaiming himself president.
9. In 1998 Kabila expelled his former allies Rwanda and Uganda. In reaction, they started waging war against Kabila's regime.
10. On January 16, 2001 Kibila was assassinated, and Joseph Kabila, his son, replaced him.

These 10 traumatic epochs show clearly how the Congolese people have been subjected to all sorts of suffering for centuries. During these periods the Congolese people never got the opportunity to express themselves either directly or through a real democratic process. Each of these periods has left large scars in the Congolese psyche that have not yet been addressed. Epochs 2 and 9 were particularly fatal for the Congolese. Ten million died in forced labor, torture and mutilations during the reign of Leopold II. Since 1998 4 million have died. The killings are accompanied by torture and the systematic rape of women. In a recent report on rape in eastern DRC international human rights bodies talk of "a war within a war." Given this history let's explore how one could apply the "four pillars" to Congolese reconciliation efforts:

### TRUTH

The process of reconciliation in DRC would have to think through innovative mechanisms of healing memories, of addressing past traumatic experiences, and reconstructing Congolese humanity. Truth needs

to be told. It took more than 100 years to get some truth on the "forgotten holocaust" of Congolese during the reign of Leopold II. Some truth started emerging about the details of Lumumba's death only 40 years after it happened. And these are just a few selective truths that only reach a very small fraction of Congolese society and hence have little if any impact on the healing process. In brief, the structures that have prevailed in the country have not created spaces for people to hear the truth and heal memories.

### MERCY

Congolese people are confronted with the dilemma of identifying with whom they have to tango. The web of responsibility includes those located outside DRC. The role played by Congolese, especially the leaders, has always been that of serving outside interests. Is it the trauma of the past that locks Congolese leaders into finding it easy to serve external actors to the detriment of their own people? If forgiveness has to take place among Congolese alone, it will not help much in the healing process because Congolese leaders are only secondarily responsible. We have a scenario where reconciliation has to take place between the primary/real victims, the Congolese, and perpetrators who most often come from outside the country. It becomes even more complex when neighboring countries openly violate international laws and commit unspeakable crimes against the Congolese people. How does somebody engage in forgiveness when the offender looks so illusive, faceless and somehow unknown?

### JUSTICE

Congolese people are crying for justice, but there is no existing framework internally and externally to accommodate this quest to their satisfaction. The only attempt was during the memorable Sovereign National Conference (CNS), but Mobutu, who was still in power, did everything to sabotage this healing process. For example CNS established the commission on ill-begotten wealth and another that looked at political assassinations in the history of the country, seeking to establish responsibilities. Mobutu suspended the whole process and the outcomes of the CNS never saw the light of day. Some hope is emerging with the recent arrest of suspects of war crimes and crimes against humanity for trial at the International Criminal Court in The Hague.



Peace is the one pillar that all those who were interested in resolving the Congo crisis have focused on. The scenario has always been the same since the independence of the country and could be summarized as follows: "cease-fire, peace accord, peacekeepers, government of unity." Peace is understood here as the absence of war, the presence of "stability" and the rule of law. Most of these efforts, if not all of them, have been internationally initiated. Thus far there have been no internally generated processes for peace and reconciliation. The current framework for the return of peace and stability in DRC was initiated and designed by the international community and proposed to theelligerents for negotiations and endorsement. The cease-fire accord was signed in Lusaka, Zambia under tremendous international pressure on the belligerents. No civil society member was represented or a signatory of the "peace truce." Elections have finally taken place, and new institutions are now functioning. Most of the country is now stable, except in the east where insecurity, partly due to external interests, still prevails.

#### SUMMARY OF SOME OF THE HISTORICAL OBSTACLES TO RECONCILIATION

##### **The Illegitimate and Violent Nature of Leadership in DRC.**

First, the external dimension of the Congolese crisis is usually overlooked by those who try to understand the dynamics of conflicts in the country. Hence they tend to blame the Congolese for apathy in view of the atrocities they endure from their leaders. Those who blame the Congolese tend to ignore the brutal and oppressive nature of the various regimes in Congo since the slave trade epoch and know nothing of the heroic efforts of many Congolese to fight against these regimes. The cumulative trauma that resulted from these tragic moments in Congolese history are overlooked and neglected.

Second, the Congolese people, before 2006, democratically elected their leaders only once, during the first Republic emerging from independence. The popular government was destroyed only a few months after the elections. The Belgians organized secessions in the center and southeastern parts of the country, two areas well endowed with strategic minerals such as cobalt,

Thus far there have been no internally generated processes for peace and reconciliation.

uranium, manganese, diamonds and copper. Eventually the popular Prime Minister Patrice Emery Lumumba was assassinated, and with him died all the ideals of nationalism and democracy. Then Mobutu came into power and enjoyed some early popularity. This was due to the fact that he came into power with the support of those who actually created the chaos in Congo. He guaranteed their interests, and in return they helped him to quell the rebellion and create a semblance of peace and stability highly appreciated by the people. He was also a very charismatic leader who made the Congolese population believe in him for a while. But he began a cult of personality and mismanaged the economy of the country and eventually destroyed all basic infrastructures.

After a violent revolution against Mobutu, Laurent Desire Kabila came to power. He was assassinated a year later, and his son replaced him. Kabila I and Kabila II rely on foreign troops for their protection and the survival of their regimes. Those who are fighting them, the so-called rebels, were respectively created and supported by Rwanda and Uganda. With the rebels these two foreign governments got deeply involved in gross human rights violations and the looting of Congolese resources in the eastern part of the country, areas they control.

The sense among Congolese of being occupied by foreign troops, the systematic and massive violations of their rights, including massacre, rape, torture, arbitrary arrest, disappearances, etc., and the permanent restrictions on their basic freedoms made the rebels and their backers widely unpopular. In brief both sides of the war were illegitimate "representatives" of the people. And it has always been that way since the creation of the entity called Congo. Currently the Congolese are testing, for the first time, the leaders they have selected.

The combination of internal powerlessness and external illegitimacy made and still make the reconciliation process in the Democratic Republic of Congo very complex and tedious.

## II. The Predatory and Extractive Nature of the Congolese Economy

From the slave trade era to the present the looting of Congolese resources has been a common thread, and gaining access to and control of them has always been accompanied by extreme violence against the Congolese people. It is as though every new discovery needed a ritual of Congolese expiatory blood. Agricultural development needed slaves among whom were large numbers of Congolese; Dunlop's and Goodyear's discovery of rubber for the automobile industry led to the genocide of 10,000,000 Congolese; forced labor, massive displacement, and other segregationist behavior during the colonial days; Mobutu did his share of killing and massacring innocent people and destroying the basic social amenities left by the colonizers. More recently 4,000,000 Congolese have died, and many are attributing this genocide to the discovery of coltan, oil and other strategic minerals in eastern DRC.

## III. THE ABSENCE OF THE CONGOLESE PEOPLE IN BOTH THE CREATION AND RESOLUTION OF THEIR CONFLICTS.

Another consistent pattern has been that neither the crises nor the solutions are in large proportion attributable to the Congolese people. As indicated earlier those who started violent conflicts in the Congo have not usually been Congolese, nor were these conflicts in their interests. Obviously the Congolese are involved to a certain degree, especially at the level of execution, but they are not, most of the time, involved in the decision making process. This leaves them even more powerless when searching for solutions. In the current crisis the Lusaka Peace Accord was designed by the other countries involved in the war in DRC, and it was brought to the Congolese for their signature. Thus those who signed the peace accord are suffering from legitimacy-deficit.

They signed on behalf of the foreign governments backing them, not on behalf of the Congolese people. The Lusaka peace accord had required the participation of the "*forces vives*," meaning members of political parties, civil society, and religious bodies in what is termed as Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD). The ICD was supposed to come up with a new political dispensation that would lead to general democratic elections where Congolese would elect their leaders. The ICD ended with a partial accord pushing the belligerents to sign a Global and Inclusive Accord, leading to a transitional constitution which has been promulgated and a transitional government.

The transitional government had an unprecedented configuration. The formula was called one plus four. It simply means one president and four vice-presidents. Two vice-presidents respectively represented the two most important rebel factions, and the two others were respectively appointed by the government of DRC and by the non-armed opposition political parties.

In DRC, and in many other African countries, recipes are manufactured from outside, and "legitimacy" is given the most "illegitimate" actors. There is, therefore, an intended or unintended disappearance of the people, the victims. Their participation is only needed to legitimize the illegitimate.

Eventually the transitional government survived. With the assistance of the international community general elections were organized in 2006 and now new institutions (government, parliament, senate, judiciary) are in place.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The combination of internal powerlessness and external illegitimacy made and still make the reconciliation process in the Democratic Republic of Congo very complex and tedious. It looks like walking a labyrinth. It will need a systematic and holistic approach that will aim to:

1. Accommodate external interests by, on one hand, aggregating Rwandan, Ugandan and Burundi interests of space and security and, on the other, coming up with clear policies on access, control and distribution of natural resources in the country. This will reduce the predatory and mafia-like exploitation of African resources by unscrupulous international organizations.



2. Resolve the longstanding animosities among Congolese communities and other Congolese of Rwandan-speaking origin by engaging the two communities not only in a dialogue but resolving the fundamental issue of their citizenship and ownership of land. This is most needed in the eastern side of the country.

3. At the national level, engage interprovincial dialogue, especially between the Kasai and Katanga provinces and overall between the eastern and western sides of the country, to create homogeneity and a sense of nationhood. Indeed, many observers were surprised that no Congolese from the government or rebel side has ever advocated the separation, secession or autonomy or any kind of partition of the country. There are a variety of motivations for this desire to remain one country.

Under these circumstances reconciliation will need justice as a foundation on which the future of DRC will be built. The new constitution has not prepared any mechanisms to deal with the authors of past atrocities committed in the eastern part of the country nor any mechanisms for compensation for the destruction and looting occasioned by years of occupation by forces from and supported by Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. It has no clause for the management of thousands upon thousands of women who have been raped, children who have been forced to kill and fight for a cause they don't understand, families that have been displaced and separated, orphans who have been abandoned, and the overall Congolese society which is disoriented. It has not prepared any mechanism that will allow quick economic recovery of the country. The DRC needs a sort of Marshal Plan in view of the destruction left by the years of war. It is encouraging that the International Criminal Court has made efforts to apprehend some of these many criminals.

More specifically the following concrete steps, as suggested by Johan Galtung, may serve as an entry point to reconciliation in the DRC:

**1. The exculpatory nature-structure-culture approach:** Explaining to the Congolese

Under these circumstances reconciliation will need justice as a foundation on which the future of DRC will be built.

people the strong involvement of external forces in their present adversarial relationships and hence removing in a way their feelings of guilt and of trauma. Yet, although the Congolese crisis has heavy external involvement both in generating the conflicts and also in finding the solutions, I still think the Congolese people have responsibility to rise up and rebuild their common vision of the Congo of tomorrow.

**2. The reparation/restitution approach:**

Trying to undo the harm by undoing the damage caused. This will work with the help of the international community by forcing, where possible, reparation of the damage caused to the Congolese infrastructures and social fabric. Here I am thinking of what is repairable like the social amenities destroyed by Rwandan and Ugandan troops. There should be restitution of what is retrievable from the hands of well known Ugandan, Rwandan, and rebels' representatives. There also should be restitution of land to their rightful owners throughout eastern DRC.

**3. The apology/forgiveness approach:**

What was initiated by violence is terminated by offering and accepting an apology; both-and, not either-or. This approach will be successful if there is a bond of compassion between the two parties, and it will fail if it is just superficial. This process should be organized countrywide at all levels: community to community; rebels to rebels; rebels to militias; militias to militias; mili-

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tias and rebels to the people; province to province; Rwanda to DRC; Uganda to DRC, international community to DRC. Frameworks of making this work should be thought through. It will be very difficult to generate a bond of compassion among all these actors, but symbolic gestures of good will in this direction will be needed.

4. **The theological/penitence approach:** The approach proceeds in a "well-described, well-prescribed chain: submission-confession-penitence-absolution; to and from God." The Congolese people are deeply spiritual. Ceremonies of purification with religious services should be organized throughout the country. At the same time traditional rituals should be organized to cleanse the abomination brought by the wars. This is where women and children as well as the land will find a place to get cleansed.
5. **The juridical/punishment approach:** The chain is the same as in the case of the theological/penitence approach; only that God is replaced by the State. "The prescribed process now reads submission-confession-punishment-readmission (to society)." An international court for crimes against humanity must be set up to judge all those known to have engaged in gross violations of human rights including massacres, torture and rape. This is crucial because it is unprecedented in Congo. Nobody has ever been asked to account for the atrocities committed against the peo-

ple. If not all, a few of those most responsible must be brought to justice to account for these atrocities. The people will feel empowered if this is done swiftly with people's participation.

6. **The codependent origination/karma approach:** In Buddhist thinking "there is no actor who alone carries 100 percent of the responsibility; it is all shared in space and time." Humans' decisions are influenced by their karma, their moral status at that moment. Though this is a more individual-centered process, civic education on shared responsibility will be an adaptation of the understanding of karma. In DRC efforts should be made to create spaces, especially at the community level, where conflicting communities, former combatants and victims come together and take responsibility for the wrong done in society. Exchange peace programs between the former conflicting communities in DRC and between DRC and neighboring countries that were involved in the war should be organized at all levels, especially among youth.
7. **The historical/Truth Commission approach:** This is a participatory process of healing memories and facing the future together. Congolese will need to write a common history. A new National Sovereign Commission could be set up which could dig out the files of the two important commissions mentioned earlier. The new NSC will have the mandate to document additional information taking into account the recent developments in the country since 1995. There should be no rush to finish, but an attempt thoroughly to document the facts without bias.
8. **The theatrical/reliving approach:** This approach stresses the importance of story telling. Each party tells their stories. The story can be told directly or in a form of a play that helps the parties to imagine an alternative future. This should be done



with the agreement of the parties, and the play must be close to the real story. Congolese will have to make use of their creativity to come up with plays, songs and rituals that will enact the recent pain the people have gone through and offer ways of embracing the common future. This should be done in an organized manner to avoid causing more harm to the victims.

9. **The joint sorrow/healing approach:** Offer space for people to express regret and imagine together alternative responses to war or future conflicts. It is recognition that the conflict has affected everybody and everybody has a story to tell, a regret to express. This process should be participatory, involving all levels of society. Such space should not be transformed into a tribunal, and the process may need some time after the disaster before it is applied. This process will fit very well in the eastern part of the country where communities have hurt each other in a very deep way. This should be organized at village levels before it is brought to district and provincial levels. It should involve everybody including representatives of the state.

10. **The joint reconstruction approach:** Build moral equality around positive acts of cooperation. There is a spiritual dimension in the reconciliation process. This is a crucial process that can be applied at both state and local levels. Burundi, DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda could revive the Community of Great Lakes Region Countries. They could make this community work on common projects engaging people from the four countries, organize security together, including common laws and regulations with regards to economic development in their region. The free movement of people and goods will be high on their agenda. There is no single country in this region that can enjoy peace when others are struggling with war and insecurity. The security of one must be the security of all. At the local level the

rebuilding of shared social amenities like roads, schools, dispensaries, churches, market places, etc., will definitely enhance the reconstruction of togetherness indispensable for healing.

11. **The joint conflict resolution approach:**

The insistence here is on massive participation of the concerned parties in two ways: by the therapy of the past, "having people discuss what went wrong, at what point and then what could have been done; and the therapy of the future, having people discuss and imagine how the future would turn out if everything is done in favor of a more sustainable peace, and what that work would look like." This process is highly recommended for all villages in the eastern part of the country. It should be carried out in every village and should be supported by neutral representatives of the government and other people of good will, especially religious organizations. At the national level a commission of reconciliation including representatives from all provinces of the country should also meet to see how to bring back sanity in the political class.

12. **The Ho'o ponopono (setting straight) approach:** Galtung indicates that in Polynesian culture there is a tradition of combining reconstruction, reconciliation and resolution. In this process, efforts are made to "see the acts in light of extenuating circumstances: nature, structure, cultures." The process also includes restitution and apology followed by forgiveness. Penitence and punishment are included as a way of building ties between victim and perpetrator. The Democratic Republic of Congo could be inspired by this approach as it resonates well with the African understanding of the "offense" and its redress that focus more on re-humanizing those involved (perpetrators, victims, the community at large). It is obvious that such a process will work better at the community level.

Any combination of approaches must be done with the full participation of the Congolese people which is crucial for any process aimed at bringing a lasting peace in DRC.

Let me conclude this reflection by saying that neither simplistic responses to complex situations nor complex answers to simple cases are helpful. The case of DRC is obviously very complex and needs sophisticated responses. The sophistication will come by trying everything possible to re-construct the Congolese social fabric. Any combination of approaches must be done with the full participation of the Congolese people which is crucial for any process aimed at bringing a lasting peace in DRC. The country has moved far from the "Lusaka Peace Accord" of 1999, with democratically elected institutions now in place since 2006. However, without a genuine and participatory framework of addressing community reconciliation, fears will remain that these peace gains could easily be reversed. The approaches provided here could serve as examples for those designing these context-based reconciliation processes. At the same time, the international community should support Congo in its efforts for economic and social recovery. This support is indispensable for the sustainability of peace and harmony in the country and the region at large. In the meantime humanitarian assistance should be provided everywhere needed throughout the country, with special attention in the eastern part where pockets of insecurity still prevail.

## RECOMMENDED READING

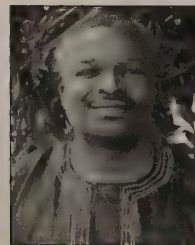
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# Understanding **Psychic Default**

Juzanne Mayer, I.H.M., Ph.D.

Whenever I first start working on a computer, I know that I will need to make certain adjustments. My preferences for font style or size and page setup just don't meet those of the computer, or more accurately, the operational system used to format it. Also, the system's assignment of a home address is a far stretch from where I actually live. So, I have to rearrange certain icons, data and settings. In other words, I need to change from the default position.

This term, default position, has a specific definition in the domain of information technology (IT), meaning a setting or value automatically assigned to a program or device "that remains in effect unless canceled or overridden by user intervention" (answers.com). As with many phrases in our technological world, this one has crept into common usage because of certain similarities with phenomena in other domains. Well known among computer users, it has for a number of years carried meaning even among politicians, historians and economists. In terms of psychological terminology, the phrase "default position" or psychic default has also borrowed from the IT world. The aspect of the term default shared across these various domains refers to the computer presets that ensure that "minimal user interaction is required" (answers.com).

## COUNSELORS AND DEFAULT POSITIONS

In a recent well-researched and comprehensive article out of the UK, Sigurd Reimers uses this term to refer to treatment dynamics. Reimers offers a warning that, with the increasing complexity facing marriage and family therapists today, the tendency toward shifting to a default position should be a growing concern. This experienced counselor and supervisor points to the pitfalls that can occur in the setting of relationship counseling when the therapist "forgets about the family under our very eyes" in the attempt to "focus on the issues happening within the family out there" (p. 230). He wonders, as he observes videos of family counseling sessions, his own and others: from where do the various interventions, approaches, statements and questions come? His concern is that too often today's ther-

apists, overwhelmed with all the tools at their disposal and not well trained in a foundational orientation, move into default; that is "a broad but shifting fallback position which helps us survive the complexities of interacting with groups of people" (p. 230). The default position, as Reimers applies it, suggests a variation on the old "seat of your pants" approach to treatment in which the therapist, in a sense, grabs at whatever seems to work in the moment. What makes it the "default position" as described here is that in the grabbing the therapist regresses to a point of security, reaching for competence in what worked before.

What I mind most about the programmed takeover my computer sometimes performs is that, robot-like, it all but eliminates my thinking—choosing self in service to speed, economy, and factory-specified efficiency. Reflecting on Reimers' creative use of the IT term, I can conceive an application of it to certain problematic individual behavior, or more precisely a syndrome of behaviors, an individual psychic default. Some of these I have seen for myself and have endured the fallout that emerged from them. In other instances, clients, supervisees, friends have shared their own struggles over some of the dilemmas they have suffered and the repercussions they have undergone. In this article, I will introduce the concept of the "psychic default" as a type of defensive, even regressive, behavior; describe its manifestations; discuss the difficulties that it can produce for the individual and others affected by it; and offer some suggestions for dealing with it.

## PSYCHIC DEFAULT AT WORK IN LEADERS

Psychic default manifests itself in persons who have fallen into what has been called a "Peter principle" situation. Faced with challenges beyond their competencies, they seem unable either to deal with challenges effectively or to reach out for resources beyond themselves that might offer support, even growth, in and through the situation. Confronted beyond their abilities, capacities and potential, these persons fall back to a previous competency, successful position or even self-myth of such. Two examples



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might translate this abstract description into flesh and blood reality. In both cases, factual details are disguised or fictionalized to protect the anonymity of those involved.

The first involves Sister A recently elected to a leadership position within her congregation that required her to deal with many of the sisters of that community in an up-close and personal way. Throughout her religious life Sister A had held fairly responsible positions, working within her congregation's ministerial assignments and acquiring a reputation as responsible and accountable, a reliable problem solver and clear analytic thinker. What few realized, pre-election, was that these skills had been exercised largely in the area of fiduciary organization. With strong innate ability in this field, Sister A had taken few of the opportunities that had been offered over the years for ongoing education. She had read much in the area of her preferred expertise and in areas of organizational management, but little outside this concentration.

With the move into congregational leadership Sister A found herself faced with many of the dilemmas familiar to contemporary religious congregations, among them: aging sisters, few new vocations, outdated resources with which persons in the ministry were struggling to do ever more complex work, and sisters who felt they were being overlooked after many years of service in favor of younger lay personnel. The first reaction of Sister A was an enormous wave of inadequacy. Though not aware of this, she constantly experienced a collision with her limits: feeling inadequate to handle the many people problems that kept landing on her desk or reaching her by phone and through email. Along with that, as she looked at the women of her congregation, many with excellent training and advanced education, a sense of her own ill-preparedness seemed to shrink what self-confidence she did have, magnifying their abilities and achievements.

Impacted by this "perfect storm" Sister A took a particular defensive stance: the psychic default. Not able to delegate, to reach out for help, to seek mentors

or wisdom figures—for all sorts of personal reasons—she moved into a fallback mode, seeking safety in past competency. Her *modus operandi* became communicating only through memorandum, considering only those requests and inquiries that came through on her newly-drafted "proposition" forms, receiving information mainly through documented reports, and ultimately putting as much distance between her and her sisters as humanly possible. The result was a very frustrated, sad and increasingly isolated group of religious women.

A second example comes from my own experience. At one point in a clinical internship I worked in a small agency in which a familial spirit of each knowing and caring for the other was the distinctive core of both its daily environment and its outreach to others. After a long period of service, the director, a wise gentle woman well-regarded by all on staff, retired and a new director was appointed from another agency setting. Mr. Z, the new director, brought with him years of experience as a middle level manager and an information analyst. Entering into what I am sure seemed (and probably was) a less than warm and welcoming staff, he arrived ready to make his mark. The mark that was needed included strengthening the bonds that existed among the staff, increasing their professional development which had been underserved with the previous director, and providing an influx of good new ideas that would build on the experience of some very well-trained professionals. The mark he insisted upon touched on none of these. Instead his whole attention focused on numbers: how many clients seen per week, how long each staff member spent per session; how many clients paid the low end of the sliding scale, how many the upper.

At first, the staff felt caught in a whirlpool of data. I remember one of our long-time social workers saying in exasperation, "If I hear quality control one more time, I will quit. I feel as if I'm working in a meat packing plant." In retrospect and with many years of growth now behind me, I can see what had happened with Mr. Z. Surrounded by individuals whose assets lay in forming relationships, networking, establishing and maintaining connectedness, he had stepped in his own quicksand of inadequacy. His strengths lay in data analysis, and so that is where he unconsciously, defensively, retreated to build his fort. Out of the bits and pieces of numbers, statistics, surveys and their outcomes he crafted a solid floor on which to stand and from which he would both protect himself and "do his job." That the spirit that had been the heart of the agency was ignored in the process was collateral damage to his need for a psychic default.



From the work of researchers in decision making comes an explanation of what might be occurring with persons trapped into "psychic default" style. A balanced decision making process involves an individual's group's consideration of diverse, effective and experience-based adaptive behaviors. Free to explore and experiment, such persons can approach novel situations as just that, occasions to investigate, to learn and grow with and through the newness. Authors Todd and Gigerenzer (2000) liken the balanced decision making approach in which different domains of thought require different processes to a mechanic's use of a tool box. Faced with wrenches, sprockets and pliers, the veteran mechanic chooses those items that will be most useful for the particular job. They note that the heuristics in the adaptive toolbox are not good or bad, rational or irrational, per se, but only relative to a particular environment" (p. 767). It is the capacity of the persons using the tools to remain flexible, creative and willing to adapt that determines the quality of the tools and the outcome of the construction.

The decision maker locked into what Todd and Gigerenzer (2007) term the "default heuristic" unquestioningly seizes upon a tried and true position. Instead of actively choosing the appropriate tool from the box, an act that requires psychic energy and volition, the default decision maker regresses to a safe position, selecting a direction or style used previously.

This allows the brain to move to the least common denominator. In a sense, if a hammer was the safest and most useful tool before, all that faces the person becomes the proverbial nail. So, Sister A sends out her forms and Mr. Z crunches his numbers.

## UNLOCKING PSYCHIC DEFAULT

If, as mentors, counselors, directors or supervisors, we experience obvious signs of the psychic default position in someone with whom we work or associate, the first and most important step in helping that person is to raise his/her awareness of the unconscious dynamics in which he/she is trapped. Reimers offers helpful questions to family therapists that can open up a new vision and provide some measure of understanding for self or others locked into the default position. With some adaptation, we might ask of ourselves or them:

- What (or whom) in my current environment do I find most threatening? Especially, what (or whom) indicates the new, the different, the most unlike myself?

- What do I notice myself saying, thinking, insisting that seems repetitive, boring, safe?
- What stresses or anxiety would I need to be open to in order to do something different? To make a change?
- From where are these stresses coming? What can I do to deal with them?
- What ideas would I like to embrace if I dared or allowed myself the time, resources, energies I would need to prepare for them?
- What style, phrases, or behaviors do I (or someone I can trust to ask) observe my falling back on when I am unsure?
- Do I see myself playing certain roles? Do I see myself demanding it of others?

Imagine what might happen if I invited a person stuck, regressed and afraid to entertain some of these ideas, held out some of these "I wonder . . ." openings to an individual trapped into a deer-in-the-headlights mindset. In a sense, the world might just crack open and the spirit who is new life, new ideas and new hope could enter.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Reimers, S. "Family therapy by default: Developing useful fallback positions for therapists," *Journal of Family Therapy*, 28 (2006), 229-245.

Todd, P. M. and G. Gigerenzer. "Simple heuristics that make us smart," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 23 (2000), 727-780.

Todd, P. M. and G. Gigerenzer. "Environments that make us smart: Ecological rationality," *Current Direction in Psychological Science*, 16:3 (2007), 167-171.



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# Book Review

*Clericalism: The Death of Priesthood*, by George Wilson, S.J. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008. 158 pages. \$19.95.

With his usual clear and trenchant style the Jesuit theologian and organizational consultant George Wilson names the elephant in the living room of the Roman Catholic Church, clericalism. It may be the biggest obstacle to the church's moving in a healthy way beyond the trauma caused by the sexual abuse crisis. This book is not, however, a jeremiad but a thorough analysis and diagnosis of the problem and a down-to-earth, practical offer of how to counter its effects.

First, he shows that the word clergy applies to a host of professions where one group becomes known for the service and/or expertise that it offers to those not of the guild, namely "laity." Lawyers, doctors, professors, military and ordained ministers are clergy according to this definition, and all are prone to clericalism, a kind of culture that exalts belonging to the guild over relationships and which is shared by both the "clerics" and the "laity."

Wilson describes the elements of any culture and unmask the unexamined assumptions that lurk in the minds and hearts of both the "clergy" and the "laity" in these cultures. The analysis of what any culture is like forms part of Wilson's attempt to separate the notion of priesthood from that of clergy.

Wilson, following the New Testament and the Second Vatican Council, indicates that priesthood applies first and foremost to all the baptized, some of whom are singled out for ordained priesthood. Priesthood, in this sense, refers to the call to holiness of all the baptized, a holiness that is shown in relationships of love and service between all the members.

Professions (clergy) are necessary developments in any society, including the churches, but professionalization brings in its train the dangers of clericalism, dangers Wilson spells out for all professions. But it must be remembered that everybody involved in a culture where there are "clergy" and "laity" are prone to these dangers. As he writes, all of us are responsible for the cultures we inhabit.

This analysis of cultures and "clergification" leads him then to an attempt to show how clericalism func-

tioned in bringing about the sexual abuse crisis. Wilson develops this section by using the metaphor of an unfolding drama, showing how gradually various "clergies" (priestly, legal, media) got involved and how clericalism made it very difficult for the actors in the drama to engage in helpful Christian relationships. The chapter is a tour de force that helps the reader to see how all of us Roman Catholics were affected and are still affected by the unfolding tragedy. As Wilson points out, trying to assign blame is no easy task where all are caught in a culture. This is not to deny that great damage was done and that some individuals were morally and criminally responsible for that damage; it is only to recognize that our desire to lay all the blame on these individuals may be a way to assuage the nagging sense of guilt many of us church members feel because we are part of the culture that enabled the tragedy.

George Wilson would not be true to himself if he left it at this analysis alone, helpful though it is. In the fifth and sixth chapters he presents practical and helpful suggestions for both the ordained and the lay members of the Christian priesthood to begin to change the clerical culture that led to our present plight. What this amounts to is summarized in the title of the fifth chapter, "Transformation: Repriesting a Clericalized Church." Basically, he calls for a transformation of a culture where clericalism prevails to one where all of us live out our shared priesthood, a very difficult, but not impossible task. He lists principles for this process. Transformation is a shared responsibility; it will take time; it will show itself in changed behavior rather than in concepts; it will involve conflict. The most important element for successful transformation will be for all parties to recognize their fundamental identity as Christians called to live and work together for the sake of the Kingdom God is building. In the final chapter he gives practical suggestions as to how the "clergy" and the "laity" can together begin the process of transforming the present clerical culture of the Roman Catholic Church. In this issue of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT dedicated to reconciliation among groups it is fitting to recommend this book as a very helpful step towards the reconciliation needed in the Roman Catholic Church itself.

— William A. Barry, S.J.